

WIMPLETHORPE  
BY ST. OLAVE'S

AUTHOR OF ST.

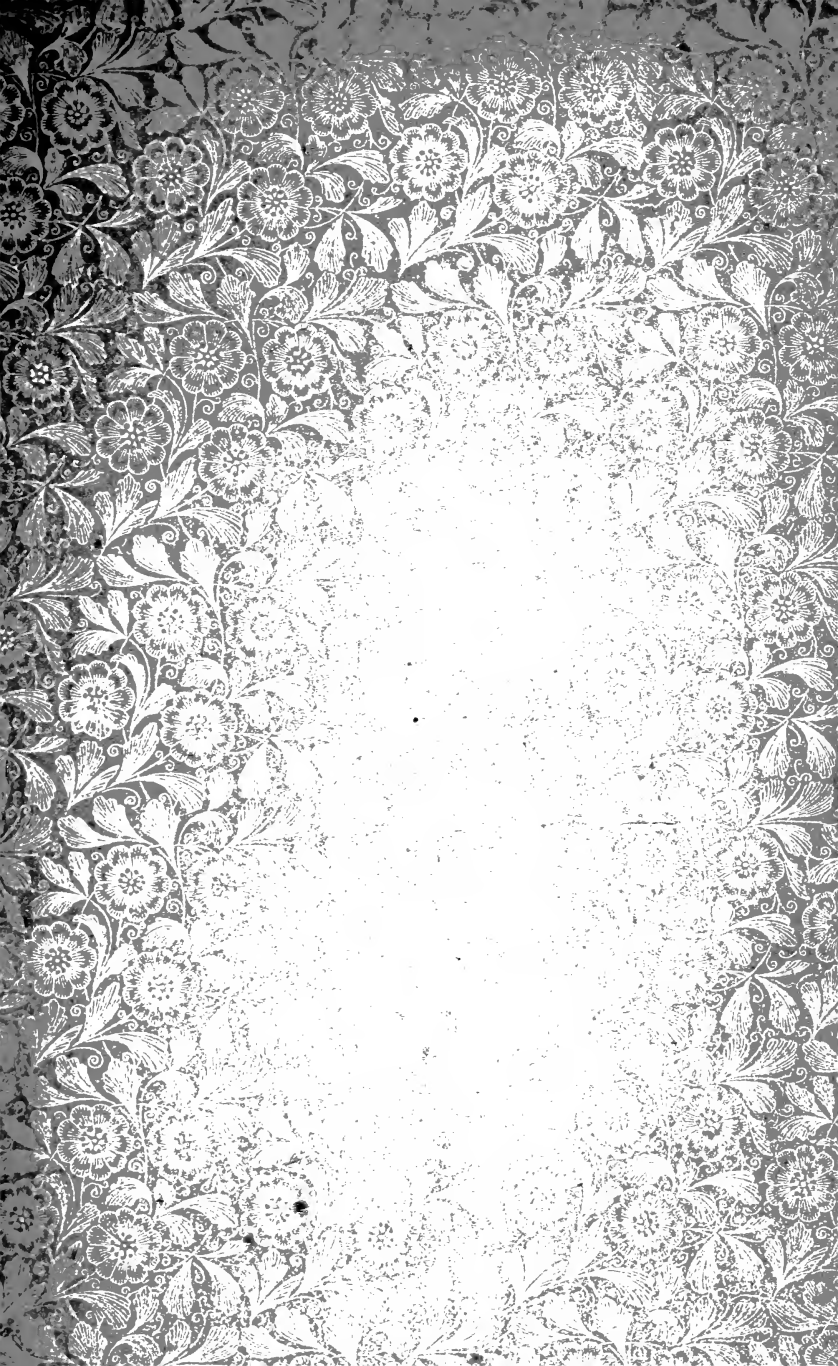


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DIMPLETHORPE.

VOL. II.

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# DIMPLETHORPE

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,” “ANNETTE,”  
“LITTLE MISS PRIMROSE,”  
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:  
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,  
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1880.

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LONDON:  
PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD,  
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

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## DIMPLETHORPE.

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### CHAPTER I.

**I**N the June of that year, Mr. Vincent and Frances Ann were married.

Mrs. Ferguson would not deny that the wedding had been a great satisfaction to her, and she had made every effort for it to go off well. Audrey and Rose Emma were bridesmaids, though, as Cousin Tholthorpe remarked, nobody would have taken them for sisters; and there was breakfast after the ceremony, and a picnic in the afternoon, young Mr. Barraclough, the head-clerk to

Lord Laxby's agent, and a great friend of Mr. Vincent, being particularly attentive to Audrey. Indeed Mrs. Ferguson said that if Audrey had been like anyone else, meaning like one of her sisters, there would have been no mistaking what he meant. But then Audrey was not like anyone else.

The young couple had taken a house a little further up the street, conveniently placed for the chapel. The congregation had come forward very handsomely with presents, such useful ones too, Mr. Polson giving a complete set of kitchen furniture, down to coal-scuttle and blacking brushes; so much more sensible than your gim-crack drawing-room ornaments. And such a number in the chapel to witness the ceremony, it was really quite delightful to see the respect paid by the people.

"Not but that I'm very thankful it's over," said Mrs. Ferguson to her cousin, as, two

days afterwards, they supped off the remains of the wedding feast in the shape of some cold pastry, Rose Emma having gone to pay a visit to her prospective mother-in-law at Moat Farm. "It's a deal of trouble in a family, is anything of this kind. But when you've done your best, well, then, you're content."

"Rose Emma will be the next," said Mrs. Tholthorpe, meditatively.

"Yes, but not before Lady-day. It's a pity that farm falls empty so inconveniently, or I had rather set my mind on a double wedding, the girls being so near an age. And when you are doing, it doesn't make so much difference. You noticed young Mr. Barraclough, Cousin Tholthorpe."

"Well, yes. And I think if Audrey had been my child, I should have mentioned it to her, for I'm sure there could have been no two opinions what he was thinking about.

And it isn't a chance to throw away. But for any notice Audrey took, he might have been not fit to wipe the dust off her shoes."

"It's with her being so taken up at the new house, Cousin Tholthorpe. She'd have done better to have kept amongst the congregation, like her sisters, where she would have had the benefit of her poor father's position. But Audrey never did seem to belong to the family, and as I was saying to Miss Burnaby, when she spoke to me about going to Miss Haythorne's, I don't feel the same responsibility as if it was me that had brought her up to reach after what she wasn't born to."

"Did you say as much as that to Miss Burnaby, Priscilla? It was a bold thing to do, and she thinking as much of herself as she does. It was what I should call plain speaking."

“If she considered it so, I’m sorry, Cousin Tholthorpe, but I must speak my mind, all the same. I am not a woman that has ever held back from speaking the truth when I felt it was my duty to do it, and you can testify to the same.”

Mrs. Tholthorpe said that she *could* testify, abundantly.

“Yes. And I said to poor William James over and over again that he was doing a senseless thing by Audrey, when he let her spend all that time over her drawing, and afterwards getting her taken up as he did by Miss Burnaby, when there were people enough amongst our own members that would have been very glad to have had her run in with their children whenever she wanted a change. But William James was a man, for all his meekness, that, if he had set his mind on anything, you might talk and talk and

better talk, and it would be done, all the same. There were people in the congregation who thought I had my own way with him too much ; but, Cousin Tholthorpe, *you* know better ; though, as for the general management, I own I did have that to do, and did it too, to the best of my ability."

"Yes, Priscilla ; you're a woman that's gone through a deal ; for Mr. Ferguson was very much set in his own way, not to call it more than that, and I don't doubt but that he was taken from the evil to come. Because some of the members did seem to have made up their minds to a different style of pulpit talent, and your husband, Priscilla, wasn't the man to listen, as you say."

"I don't deny it, Cousin Tholthorpe."

"No, and it isn't pleasant for a minister when he has to resign, and no invitation either, anywhere else, which I don't think

your husband had, Priscilla, up to the last."

Priscilla did not say whether he had or not. Indeed it was no business of Mrs. Tholthorpe's to have mentioned the matter at all. Mrs. Ferguson was thankful to say William James was a very good husband, as men went, and she had a satisfaction in knowing that he died respected, even though his preaching might not have been what the people were able to appreciate. And though she, as his wife once and widow now, knew his shortcomings as well as anyone, she was not going to let any of her relations dwell upon them, least of all Mrs. Tholthorpe, who, having had her own husband in the ministry too, always seemed to think she had a right to talk. Mr. Tholthorpe might have been an acceptable preacher, or he might not, she rather thought he had been the latter, though her cousin dwelt with so

much complacency on the number of invitations he had had. But it came to the same thing in the end, that men all had their faults.

“And so I don’t think, Cousin Tholthorpe, there’s any need for us to draw comparisons.”

“I wasn’t doing anything of the sort, Priscilla, nor ever had such an intention. I only expressed what I felt to be truth, like yourself. And I will say, Priscilla, that you’re a woman who has done well by your children. It’s very few that could have brought them on so, and left as you were.”

Mrs. Ferguson flung back her cap strings, but not in an aggressive manner. Cousin Tholthorpe was generally able to see things in a proper light, and very sensible of her, too, for she would not be likely to have a more comfortable home anywhere else than she had at the Moat House.

“Cousin Tholthorpe, I don’t say anything

about the way in which I've been enabled to do my duty. I daresay a many would, but I've more sense. My mother always used to say to me, 'Priscilla dear, you will never let the grass grow under *your* feet,' and it was well for me, situated as I have been, that I had a disposition accordingly."

"Shall you take anyone else, Priscilla?"

Mrs. Ferguson looked inquiringly. Did Cousin Tholthorpe mean, had she any intention of marrying again? For with the girls settling one after another in that way, there was no telling. But Cousin Tholthorpe was only thinking of Mr. Vincent's empty room.

"I don't see why Miss Parley and Mrs. Frogston should get them all, Priscilla, and you so able to make a single man comfortable."

Mrs. Ferguson understood.

"Oh! it's the apartments you refer to.

Well, yes, it had entered my mind, only I shouldn't take any party that presented itself, as Mrs. Frogston does. Audrey was saying something about that young Hathaway coming back, and if it's true that he has been getting on so wonderfully abroad, one might give it a thought. You know what happened, Cousin Tholthorpe."

Mrs. Tholthorpe did not know. Mrs. Ferguson was just going to tell her about that conversation in the parlour, the night before Phil went abroad, when Audrey herself came in from Miss Burnaby's, and said, very quietly,

"Mr. Hathaway is coming home next month, and he is to stay in Dimplethorpe for awhile, before he settles in London."

"Oh, indeed! Miss Burnaby has told you so."

"Yes."

And Mrs. Ferguson turned over the

matter in her own mind. He might be of the same opinion still, or he might not. There was never any telling. But at any rate he would be a very likely young man to have in the house.

That was June. And with the roses and honeysuckle and meadow sweet of July, Phil Hathaway came back to Dimplethorpe.

## CHAPTER II.

MISS BURNABY and Audrey were right in saying that Phil could never be anyone but himself, that no success or promise of success could alter him from the simplicity of the old times.

In these three years of toil and endeavour, he had thought more of the much to be reached after than of the little that had been won. And indeed, amongst the gifted men with whom he had lived, men whose whole long lives had been spent in patient seeking and working, and who yet counted not themselves to have apprehended but a

little of their noble art, who was he, and what had he done, that he should be other than very meek and humble?

Coming back to Dimplethorpe too, where everyone, from the Squire himself down to the sexton who delved in the churchyard, knew him for what he was, old Ben Hathaway the basket-maker's grandson, gathering osiers in the willow flats, and only saved from being a basket-maker himself by the charity of others, it would be poor work to try and appear better than he really was. So Phil came back minded to give himself no airs, but just to live quietly and let his talents do what they could for him.

He did not tell anyone, not even Miss Burnaby, the time of his coming, for he wanted to go round the place alone first. Leaving his bag at the station, he went across to the osier flats, to the old willow stump where Mr. Ferguson had found him,

ten years before. A grand find that for himself, Phil owned, as, standing there with his back to the mossy trunk, he thought of all that had come to pass between those old basketmaking days and these, when with skill in his fingers to paint the thoughts that worked in his brain, and power at last to make people see things as he saw them himself—that dream of his boyish ambition—he stood, a man, with the world all before him, and nothing to hinder his making a good and worthy name therein.

Phil's thoughts went back over all those years to that memorable evening when, looking up from his picture on the ragged leaf of the old prayer-book, he met the minister's quiet, melancholy face looking down upon him, and at once they were friends. The minister was dead now, and Audrey, Miss Burnaby had told him, was growing into a very refined and superior woman.

Miss Burnaby need not have told him that. He was quite sure that Audrey, if only true to herself, could never grow up into anything but a very refined and superior woman. She might or might not have become much of an artist; for Phil, with his six years' experience in London and abroad, looked upon pictures with quite a different criticism from that which he had bestowed upon Audrey's rather superior attempts under her father's training. That was a matter of little consequence. If she had enough knowledge of art to appreciate his own advance in it, that was the most satisfactory result he could wish for her. Phil could paint enough for them both, and a man would always rather that a woman, especially the woman he thinks of making his wife, should appreciate his work, rather than rival him in it.

For Phil was still in the same mind as when he fidgeted about so uneasily on his

chair in Mrs. Ferguson's parlour, and then, in a very awkward, stumbling fashion, made that request to be allowed to correspond with Mrs. Ferguson's daughter; request which as yet Audrey had never so much as heard of. Not that he was minded to go and ask for the same privilege just now, but still he had decided long ago that some day the minister's meek, fair-haired daughter should be his wife; and he thought, like most other men, that in matters of this kind he had only to ask and have; that is, if fair play were given him first.

He would go and see the place where he and Audrey used to sketch together. Probably Mrs. Ferguson did not live in the Moat House now. Miss Burnaby had not told him anything about that. So crossing the osier flats and pausing for awhile by his grandfather's cottage, where Harriet Brown was knitting on her three-legged stool inside

the doorway, he strolled along to the bit of waste ground which sloped down from the Moat House garden to the water, and leaped the bit of low fencing which shut it in from the open path. Somebody was there, in that same grassy hollow where he had so often made a seat for her. Was it Audrey? Likely enough. For she was making a coloured sketch of that little corner of the Moat, with its tall reedy grass and the broad lily leaves, and a bit of twisted hawthorn, with some reddening briony-berries shining amongst it, stooping down to the water's edge. Sketching it so earnestly that he found he could come close up to her, and criticise both her and her work, without being noticed. And then he was sure it was Audrey.

First of all he criticised her. At least what he could see of her, which was only a little bit of profile and some soft fair hair, and a hand than which no queen's need be daintier

or whiter, moving lightly to and fro upon her sketching board. The rest was all brown holland and still browner hat, except a shred of blue ribbon knotted round her throat. But he could see enough of the face to know that it was meek and almost childlike as ever, and the soft rosy lips were as loveable, and folded down almost as gravely, as when, seven years ago, he had told her to hold up her head that he might kiss them.

And the picture. Well, that was good of its sort, but not so good as to keep him from having a most encouraging sense of his own superiority. For a girl's work it was very nice, especially for a girl who had been able to give so little time to study; and it showed quite enough feeling for art to make him sure that she would be able to appreciate what he had been doing himself, during his three years on the Continent.

That was just as far as Phil wished that Audrey should ever go.

He stood there for a full quarter of an hour, watching herself and her work, chiefly herself. And then he stooped down, and taking hold of the hand that was just lifted for a moment as she turned her head a little to consider her last touches, he said,

“Well done, Audrey! You have been a real good girl. Now give over a little while and talk to me.”

“Oh, Phil! I am so glad.”

And what a happy light there was in Audrey's eyes, and what a rosy red of pleasure in her cheeks as she turned and looked him in the face! For she had no time to think whether or not she should let him know how glad she was to see him again; and for Audrey to think much about anything that concerned the manifestation of her own feelings, was generally to wrap her

up in a veil of shy reserve. So that for once, and that the first time, Phil saw her as she really was.

“You must not think me very rude, Audrey, but I have been looking at you and your picture for ever so long. I could not be quite sure, you know, at first, that it really was you; and I didn’t know, either, whether you lived here now. But as you do, it is all right.”

“Of course it is all right,” said Audrey, making room for him, as he seemed inclined to come and take possession of his old seat in the bit of grassy hollow. Somehow she did not feel at all constrained with him, for there was just the old frankness and pleasantness about his manner, and his face was scarcely altered, except that it was a little browner than it used to be, and he had a regular proper beard. For all the rest, it was the same Phil who used to help

her to make her towers straight, and to get her skies nicely tinted ; and fortunately Audrey did not remember the kiss just then, or it would have put an end to everything.

“But why did you never tell anyone that you were coming?” she asked, when he had settled himself down close to her. Of course he was obliged to be close to her, for there was only room for two in that particular bit of hollow. “Or did you tell anyone?”

“No, I didn’t. I wanted to go about quietly, and see some of the old places ; first of all I have been to the osier flats, to that very bit of willow tree where your father found me first, Audrey, and then I went to grandfather’s cottage, and then I thought I would come here and see the place where we used to draw together. I see old Harriet Brown lives at the cottage now, and there is a bundle of osiers yet in the

yard where I used to have to do the soaking and peeling for grandfather."

Phil said this without a shadow of reserve, that Audrey might see, from the very first, that he was not afraid of talking about the old times.

"And then I meant to have found out where you lived."

"Well, you see we live just where we used to live. Mamma found that it was not necessary for us to remove when Papa died. You know Papa is dead." All that Audrey felt in saying this, she kept to herself, as was her wont.

"Yes."

And that was all Phil said about it. But there was something in his tone which said the rest.

"Cousin Tholthorpe lives with us now, and Mr. Vincent used to live with us too, but he was married last month to my sister,

Frances Ann, and they are gone to a house higher up the street."

"Who is Mr. Vincent?"

"He is the minister who came here when Papa died. And now I earn my living by teaching."

"Teaching what? Drawing?"

"No; all sorts of things. I teach Mrs. Haythorne's little boy."

"And who is Mrs. Haythorne?"

"Oh! she is the wife of Major Haythorne, who has come to live at the new house, opposite Miss Burnaby's. I do think she is the very best lady in all the world, except, of course, Miss Burnaby herself."

"Then she must be very good indeed. But I am not disposed to say so much until I have seen her. However, if she is good to you, that is a great deal."

"She is as good to me as ever she can be. I used to teach at Miss Hart's school before,

but this is ever so much better; for when there isn't anybody there, I go in and have tea with Mrs. Haythorne of an afternoon, and we talk about all sorts of things. She is very clever, and everything about her is so beautiful. Miss Burnaby is going to take you to see her, because she is quite an artist, and has seen the pictures in the great galleries, and she says she is longing to have a talk with you. You know there is no one here who can talk to her about pictures."

"Except yourself, Audrey. If you are anything like what you used to be, I should think by this time you might talk about art to Mrs. Haythorne or Mrs. anybody else, quite as well as any woman need want talking to. Let me see how you have been getting on during these seven years. I don't want to hear any more about this Mrs. Haythorne."

And Phil, without waiting for further

permission, took Audrey's sketch and began to examine it.

"It is very nice, Audrey, considering. If I had seen this before I went to Italy, I should have said it was very good indeed."

Audrey's hopes fell. She had set up rather a higher standard for herself, as regarded her artistic career, than Phil had set up for her. She did not know that he only wanted her to go just so far as a woman should go in order to be able to admire her husband, and see how much farther he is going. Looked at in that light, her performances were very creditable. Audrey was in hopes he would have encouraged her to go on. Instead of that, he only told her that, before he knew what art really was, he might have called her efforts tolerably good. But now.

"But now when you know what things ought to be," she said meekly, taking

her board back, "it makes a difference."

"Yes, it makes a difference. You know what I mean, don't you? It's very nice indeed; *very* nice. But for anyone to do things really well, they must be able to spend any time over them."

"And I can't. I can only spend a little, when I come home from Mrs. Haythorne's. And you don't think I shall ever be able to paint well enough to earn my living by it."

Phil did not mean that she ever *should* earn her living by it, and so it was not necessary for him to look at the subject in that light. And of course he could not tell how every word disappointed her.

"Well, I would not think about it, Audrey, if I were you. As I said before, that sketch is very nice, considering all things. But, you know, I should recommend you to study painting more for the sake of being able to enjoy and understand pictures than to paint

them yourself. That is always best, unless one has a very distinct talent for it."

"And unless one doesn't want to earn a living by it," suggested Audrey.

"Oh! bother the living! If you only think of the living, to begin with, you are not likely ever to become much of an artist. You must love art so much that you are content to follow it, whether it gives you any living or not. But don't let us have a lecture on art, it is as bad as always talking about Mrs. Haythorne. Stand up, Audrey, and let me look at you. Whatever have you been doing, to make such a difference in yourself?"

Very humbly and obediently Audrey rose and drew herself to her full height, looking down upon him half shyly from under the brim of the brown straw hat.

"Put it off, Audrey."

And Phil gave it a tilt with his umbrella,

sending it down amongst the grass, and letting the low evening sunlight gleam through the thorn bush on Audrey's rippling hair.

"There, that is better."

And indeed Audrey made a pretty picture as she stood there, fair enough even in the eyes of one who had been accustomed to look for beauty, and find it too, amongst the dark-locked, pomegranate-lipped daughters of the south. Those years of thought and purpose and endeavour had given a look of nobility to the girl's face, apart from its mere natural prettiness of feature and colouring. There was strength as well as sweetness in the level, delicately-penciled brows, and the low broad forehead, from which the hair rolled waving away, just falling a little, half to hide and half to reveal the tiny, shell-like ears. And there was a strange unconscious grace in her atti-

tude, all the more strange because it was so unconscious. Miss Burnaby had noticed this many a time, and called it Audrey's princess-like air. Mrs. Ferguson had noticed it, too, and the fact began to dawn upon her that her eldest daughter was, as she expressed it to Cousin Tholthorpe, "a genteel sort of figure, rather out of the common way." Audrey had not found it out yet, perhaps never would find it out, for she was very slow in coming to the knowledge of anything that could give her even a comfortable amount of self-confidence, but she was little less now than beautiful. Some old ancestor of her father must have given her that bearing which set her so apart from Rose Emma and Frances Ann, who, with hair and figures and complexion quite up to the average, yet so evidently belonged, as their mother complacently remarked, "to my side of the family."

And yet there was something so meek about the girl as she stood there, forgetting almost, in thinking of Phil's words, that Phil himself was looking so earnestly at her. Those words had rather pulled down her little castles in the air, and perhaps one great element in Phil's satisfaction at that moment was the knowledge that they had done so. For she was beginning to exert that sort of magnetic influence over him which these meek, gentle natures, yet proud withal, do exert over men with a man's love of power, and with a man's love, too, of exercising that power over those who, if they only knew it, have something within them which can turn and strive and resist, and perhaps conquer in the end.

## CHAPTER III.

JUST at that moment, Rose Emma came along the lilac walk, with young Mr. Tewksby. This was his evening for coming over from the Moat farm and improving the shining hours with his beloved. Rose Emma was resplendent in pink ribbons, and her pretty hair was frizzed and rolled up into an enormous chignon behind, whose weight necessitated a frequent hitch to keep it in position ; and she looked altogether happy and complacent and commonplace, a girl who had done well for herself, and knew it, and wished all the world to know it, too.

"Is that one of your sisters, Audrey?" said Phil, lazily turning over in his grassy seat as he heard the voices. "I seem to remember her face."

"Yes, it is Rose Emma."

"And who is that walking with her?"

"It is young Mr. Tewksby, from the Moat farm. She is going to be married to him some time next year."

"Oh!"

Audrey scarcely knew why, but she felt just a little bit vexed with Phil's tone. It implied that neither Rose Emma's general air of pink ribbonness, nor her companion's evidently provincial manners, were in harmony with his own ideas. Of course it was not to be expected that they should be so, but at the same time Phil had no right to let that be known, least of all to her. And yet Phil's opinions and Phil's ideas of what was seemly and beautiful, were of such

importance to her that she was already beginning to look at things through his eyes, and to see them as he would be affected by them.

“Why, Audrey!” said Mr. Tewksby, with a sort of pre-brotherly familiarity, “who would have thought of finding you here? Rose Emma and I thought we were going to have the garden all to ourselves. This is a fine way of coming out to sketch the moat, eh?”

And Rose Emma’s lover, quite capable, as he thought, of appreciating the situation, looked first at Phil and then at the drawing-board.

Audrey’s cheeks flushed. She understood what he meant, and so, she was sure, must Phil have done.

“Mr Tewksby, this is Mr. Hathaway, who has just come from Italy. Frances Ann, you remember Philip Hathaway, don’t you?”

"Oh, yes!" said that young lady, giving her chignon a vigorous push behind, "you used to come to our house when poor Pa was living. I hope you are quite well, Mr. Hathaway. But we won't interrupt you."

"You are not doing that," said Phil, rather stiffly, Audrey thought. "I came down here to see the view of the Castle from the moat side, and I happened upon Miss Ferguson quite unexpectedly."

And then, raising his hat to them, and just glancing towards Audrey, he said,

"Shall we go on now to see Mrs. Ferguson?"

She followed him, leaving Frances Ann giggling in the distance. She fancied, too, that she heard Mr. Tewksby say something about basket-making. Perhaps Phil heard it, perhaps he did not. He only strolled on,

talking pleasantly and politely, but with a vague change in his manner, which perhaps no one but Audrey could have noticed, until they reached the parlour, where Mrs. Ferguson was seated with her cousin Tholthorpe.

Phil had not altered enough for the minister's widow to have any difficulty in recognising him. Flinging her capstrings briskly on one side, she came forward.

"Mr. Hathaway, to be sure. My daughter was telling me you were expected home somewhere about this time, and very glad to see you we are. My cousin, Mrs. Tholthorpe, Mr. Hathaway. I don't think you've met before. Mrs. Tholthorpe came to live with me when poor Mr. Ferguson died. And so you're going to settle in Dimplethorpe."

"Well, for the present," said Phil, making courteous salutations to the two

ladies, with an unexpressed "oh!" in the background of his thoughts, which again Audrey divined, without its needing to assume the definiteness of speech.

"I'm sure," Mrs. Ferguson continued, "it's quite a pleasure to see you back in Dimplethorpe, and to settle, too. I wish poor Mr. Ferguson could have lived to see the day. He always said he was sure you would not be ashamed to come to the place."

Audrey wished her mother would stop.

"Not in the least, Mrs. Ferguson," said Phil. "I am only sorry I cannot thank Mr. Ferguson any longer, for all his kindness to me."

Mrs. Ferguson took out her pocket-handkerchief. It was a tribute she always paid to the mention of the late minister's name. She did not now, nearly two years having elapsed since his death, do more

than take it out and put it back again, but it was a tribute, all the same.

And then she put Phil through his catechism, Audrey sitting by, mute and uncomfortable. Had he any prospects at present? Was he able to sell his pictures pretty well? Did he think of taking pupils, for there were two or three schools in the village now? And was he going into apartments, or should he furnish a house?"

To which Phil replied that he thought of going into apartments, but as he had only that afternoon come down from London, and Mrs. Ferguson's was the first house he had entered, he had not had time to make any arrangements.

"No, quite right, Mr. Hathaway, and I always say it is the best way to look round you, and make a choice. Or else I could accommodate you myself, very comfortably.

You know I've had the young minister here ever since he came, until he and Frances Ann were married a month ago, and I have not inquired yet after anyone else, so that the rooms are quite at liberty. Very comfortable too. I daresay you remember poor Mr. Ferguson's study, and I am sure we should not quarrel about terms."

Phil looked uneasy, and so did Audrey. But Mrs. Ferguson went triumphantly on.

"I don't suppose there is any house in Dimplethorpe where you could be made more comfortable, for I always make it a rule to let people come in and go out just as they like, so long as the hours are regular, and it would seem almost like home to you, coming as you were accustomed to do in my husband's time."

And something in Mrs. Ferguson's manner seemed to imply that the least Phil could do, under the circumstances, seeing how he had

been indebted to the minister's kindness, would be to pay a little of that debt, if only a little, by taking the rooms at a handsome weekly rent.

"But I don't press it," she continued, seeing that he hesitated. "It only just struck me, as you didn't appear to be settled with anything. Or else it's a matter of no importance to me, so long as you're comfortable. And now I suppose you will sit down and have a bit of supper with us. We always sit down at nine o'clock."

Phil excused himself. He said he thought he ought to go and see the Burnabys first.

"Oh, yes!" And Mrs. Ferguson bridled a little.

"I wouldn't on any account that you should not pay every attention at the Manor House. Not that we did not endeavour to make as much of a home for you, according to our ability, as the General himself, but circum-

stances are different. Only we shall be glad to see you whenever you are disposed to come in. And if you should find that it would be convenient to you to have the rooms—”

“Thank you very much,” said Phil. And then he went away.

As Audrey opened the door for him, she said,

“Phil, I don’t want you to come here and live. You know what I mean. It wouldn’t be comfortable for you.”

Phil did know what she meant, for he looked into her face, and saw the tears shining in her eyes.

“I understand, Audrey. Never mind. It is all right. But anyhow I couldn’t have come. I shall have to be content with much humbler lodgment than your mother would be likely to give me, for I shall need to live on bread and cheese until I can make my

own way. - Good-bye. I shall be seeing you some of these days at Miss Burnaby's, I suppose."

"A personable young man, isn't he, Cousin Tholthorpe?" said Mrs. Ferguson, when the two ladies were alone together, Audrey crying in her own room, and Rose Emma and Mr. Tewksby talking Mr. Hathaway over in the garden. "Not to call handsome; he never promised for that, but still something about him out of the common way."

"Yes, Priscilla."

And then, after a pause, Mrs. Tholthorpe continued,

"I shouldn't wonder if Audrey was to do as well as any of them, after all."

Mrs. Ferguson understood, and, so far from taking offence, smiled acquiescence.

"I daresay you're right, Cousin Tholthorpe. It looked attentive, his coming here before he had made any other calls. Not but that

it was his duty to do it under the circumstances, seeing what a friend William James had been to him ; but it showed which way his mind was set, all the same."

For Mrs. Ferguson had told her cousin that little occurrence in the parlour the night before Phil went away, three years before ; and Mrs. Tholthorpe had given it as her opinion that Mrs. Ferguson had, under the circumstances, acted the part of a true mother.

"I shouldn't at all wonder, Priscilla, but that he had been saying something to her before ever they came in, by the way she looked and fidgeted, not a bit like herself, poor thing ! But she's not a girl that expresses herself."

"You're right, Cousin Tholthorpe. Now, if it had been Rose Emma or Frances Ann, you would have known directly. There

isn't such a thing as concealment about them."

"No. I taxed Frances Ann as soon as ever I made up my mind there was something between her and Mr Vincent, and she opened out to me, and was as free as possible, before ever it came to an engagement. Now, if you were to speak to Audrey, I'll be bound you wouldn't get a word out of her."

"I don't suppose you would. She's just her Pa over again for keeping herself to herself. Such a difference from my side of the family. But Audrey's a good girl, after all."

"Priscilla, I hope and trust you don't think I was meaning anything to the contrary. I'm not the woman to do it. You've cause to be satisfied with *all* your girls, only there's differences *and* differences in a family, and Audrey hasn't it for openness

the same as the rest: but I am sure, poor girl! I have every respect and affection for her, and I wish her well from the bottom of my heart. I can't say more than that, can I, Priscilla?"

"No, Cousin Tholthorpe, and I don't doubt your affection for any of them. And it really would seem providential if he was to board with us, which I don't doubt he will, only, of course, it wouldn't be respectful to the General to make any arrangement without consulting him first. You see, Audrey is that sort of girl that if she hadn't the way made very plain for her, she would never make it plain for herself."

"That's it, Priscilla. That's just what I was meaning to say myself, all along, only I didn't wish to give offence. But I'm quite sure, after what has passed already between them, it will be her own fault if it does not turn out an engagement. And the very

best thing for her, she being the sort of girl she is."

And then the widowed ladies kissed and parted for the night.

## CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE Audrey, as aforesaid, was crying in her own room.

Not that she could have told herself, or anyone else, what the crying was about, only everything seemed to have gone wrong. What little satisfaction she had once been able to feel in her work, had been taken away by Phil's estimate of it, an estimate which she felt sure must be true, or Phil, who of course knew all about everything now, would not have given it. How stupid of her to have thought that with just an hour's practice at the tired end of the

day, and an afternoon twice a week at those Kensington classes, she could ever do anything that a real artist, a man who gave all his time to it, could look upon with praise? Phil had doubtless told her only a little, a very little, of what he really thought, when he said that, considering all things, her drawings were just tolerably pretty. If he had spoken the real truth, he would have said they were good for nothing.

Then that miserable five minutes when Rose Emma and Mr. Tewksby came up, and that jocose, familiar look on Mr. Tewksby's face, which meant that *he* knew well enough, if nobody else did, why she and Phil Hathaway had "happened" to meet there. Phil knew what it meant too, else why did his manner change so? Why did it drop into such commonplace courtesy? And to crown all, her mother asking him to come and board at their house. But that would

be too dreadful. For there was something in Cousin Tholthorpe's look which intimated that she, too, knew how things were going; at least she knew how they ought to be going, and the very thought of that made Audrey's cheeks burn so that her tears dried up before they had time to fall.

Oh! if people would but let her alone. Or if she could be like Rose Emma and Frances Ann, who only smiled and looked pleasantly conscious when Cousin Tholthorpe said anything of that kind to them. Audrey remembered the jokes and teasing remarks which had preceded each of those engagements, and she felt that she would rather never see Phil again than have anything of that kind said to her, and in his presence, too.

It was weary, troublesome work. And now she could not hide herself away from it in that other work which had once given

her so much innocent pleasure. Audrey went to her portfolio and took out the drawing she had made for Phil, that drawing which he had asked her to make, of the castle and the moat; and she tore it into little pieces, and wrapped them up in paper, and laid them carefully away. She could not bring herself to burn them, for she had had a delight in making that drawing, not for its own sake only, but for Phil's, who had said that she must make it for him, and he would take care of it all his life. How ridiculous that sounded now, when he knew what really good work was.

And poor Audrey's tears flowed afresh, whilst Cousin Tholthorpe and Mrs. Ferguson in the room below her, were discussing how much a year Phil would make, and how soon he might be expected to come forward in a decided manner with respect to that proposal which he had made

tentatively more than three years before.

One good thing, however, did happen. Next morning there was a very polite note from Phil to her mother. Phil said he was very sorry not to be able to avail himself of Mrs. Ferguson's kind offer, respecting the apartments, but as his resources for the next two years at any rate, and probably for much longer than that, would be very limited, he should find it necessary to economise accordingly. And therefore he had decided to take a couple of rooms with Harriet Brown, in the cottage where his grandfather used to live. He should have a good light for painting there, which was the principal thing he wanted, and for the rest he must be content. But he said he hoped to be able to call before long and thank Mrs. Ferguson for her kindness.

"To think of it now," said that lady to Frances Ann, who, in all the splendours of

new dress, bonnet and mantle, had run in to have a chat with her mother in the intervals of wedding calls. "The very place of all others you'd have thought he would have kept away from, if he had the least regard for the feelings of his friends. And coming forward as he did three years ago, about your sister; why, he might be sure the family would never approve of his putting himself into such a hole. Why, it's like going and inviting all Dimplethorpe to remember what he used to be."

"It won't make the difference you think, Ma," said Frances, who had picked up a little more knowledge of the world in such matters. When a young man can paint pictures and get them into exhibitions, it doesn't so much signify what sort of a place he chooses to live in. You'll see, Ma, that the vicar will call upon him, just the same."

"The vicar may please himself, Frances

Ann. I look upon it as his place to call upon everyone in the parish, and make himself agreeable too, let them live where they may; and I hope your husband, Frances Ann, will see it his duty to do the same. You will please to tell him so from me, for I wouldn't on any account have Philip Hathaway think we are not all of us paying him the attention that is proper."

"Of course, Ma, if Mr. Hathaway comes to the chapel, George will act accordingly."

"Frances Ann, I wish Mr. Hathaway to be called upon, whether he comes to the chapel or not. I intend to do by him exactly as your poor dear Papa would have done, and he never looked down upon anyone, let them live where they might. But if young Hathaway thinks *that* is the sort of place to go to, and his intentions with respect to Audrey what they are, why, I can only say he is very much mistaken."

“A man must do according to his means, Ma.”

“My dear, I know that,” said Mrs. Ferguson, with dignity. “I beg to observe that I am not a baby. But if the young man was only possessed of ten shillings a week, he might lodge himself with more respectability than at Harriet Brown’s cottage, to say nothing of the associations of the place.”

“I daresay he hasn’t a great deal more than that, Ma,” said Frances Ann, with a natural air of complacency arising from the fact of George’s nice little property in the East Warrenshire Bank. “You see it makes all the difference when a man doesn’t come into anything from his parents. But I wouldn’t put him down hastily, Ma. Audrey might go farther and fare worse.”

Because, on the strength of having been married for a month, and married to the

minister, too, Frances Ann felt that she had such an exact knowledge of what her Mamma ought to do with regard to Audrey's somewhat indefinite matrimonial prospects.

"Frances Ann, you may leave me to judge. I have not brought up my family to the present time, to want telling what is my duty to any of them. If it is my word that can prevent it, your sister Audrey shall never have to go through what I had, with your poor Papa's narrow income, for she is not the girl to make the best of it. And with Mr. Barraclough, as desirable a young man as ever stepped, only waiting for the slightest encouragement. I know what is required of me, Frances Ann, as well as you can teach me, thank you."

"I didn't mean any offence, Ma," said Mrs. Vincent, getting up to go away. "I

only think it's a pity to judge a young man by the sort of lodgings he goes into."

"I don't judge anyone, Frances Ann. I do my duty according to the best of my ability, and there I leave it. I don't say that I have made up my mind in any way about Mr. Hathaway. It may be a very proper thing on his part to save money whilst there is a chance, for he'll save little enough when he begins to get a family about him. At the same time, I shall not see it my duty to encourage him, until I know what his prospects are, and especially with Mr. Barraclough ready to step forward, as he is. But I should wish your husband to call upon him, Frances Ann, and I look to you to express my wishes to that effect. As the widow of the minister who was for nineteen years set over the congregation, I feel I have a right to speak my mind."

“Very well, Ma, I’ll tell him.”

And Mrs. Vincent, who could hold her own as well as anybody, took her departure.

## CHAPTER V.

**B**UT Miss Burnaby thought Phil had done quite right, when he went over next morning and told her that he had taken two rooms in Harriet Brown's cottage. And she told her brother so, when Phil had gone. The old General saw it in just the same light.

“Phil's a brick, Jane. It isn't one in a thousand could have done such a thing, and I respect him for it fifty times more than if he had gone and perched himself up in Miss Parley's bay window, and expected all the swells in the place to call upon him.”

“They'll do it all the same, Jack, I hope,”

said his sister. "I had made up my mind to Miss Parley for him, on account of giving him a sort of position from the first, but I quite see he has done the right thing by going to his grandfather's cottage."

"If they don't do it all the same, it will be so much the worse for them, Jane. Phil has got the root of the matter in him, I saw that from the very first ten minutes he was here last night, and you'll live to see that some of these days it won't be who chooses to take notice of him, but whom he chooses to take notice of, himself. Phil might go and live in the osiermen's huts on the willow flats if he liked, and better folks than you and myself, Jane, would find him out there, fast enough."

"I believe you're right, Jack. I'm very glad, anyhow, he did not go to board with Mrs. Ferguson. Not that he wouldn't have been very comfortable, for they do say she

is an excellent manager, but somehow I should not have liked it for him."

"Nor I, Jane. He would never have got left enough to himself there, and that is what a young man wants, if he is to do anything at painting."

But that was not why, though Miss Burnaby said never a word about it. She could chatter away as fast as anybody about matters that were public property, but she knew where to draw the line between the rights of the public and the rights of the individual; and she drew it as clearly as a good-hearted woman's perception could make it.

She had been very much pleased with Phil. These three years during which he had worked so well and made for himself a fair position amongst the young artists of his time, had taken away none of the simplicity of his early days, and not much of the

shyness, whilst they had given him refinement and knowledge of the world enough to take him creditably into any society. And she saw, too, that that same knowledge of the world would make him doubly alive to the shortcomings of the society he would be likely to meet if he went much to the Moat House. Far better for him to see Audrey, when he saw her at all, amidst surroundings which would make a more suitable setting for her own gracefulness. Mrs. Ferguson was doubtless an excellent housekeeper, and an admirable mother of a family, where the family consisted of such members as Rose Emma and Frances Ann; but Audrey herself was seen to the least possible advantage in such an atmosphere of commonplace, and her quietness only made the bustle and noise and general business-like activity of the household seem more violent by contrast.

Miss Burnaby put a little card in her bedroom window that afternoon. She always did so when she wanted Audrey to go across from Meadowfield Lodge before she went home, and Audrey used to look for it as regularly as possible when she had put little Victor through the last of his lessons.

"I wanted to ask you, my dear, if you would come over quite quietly and dine with us to-morrow evening. You don't need to make any change of dress. You can come just as you are. You know you can bring a lace collar or anything of that sort with you in the morning, and I can give you a few geraniums for a finishing touch. There will be nobody but ourselves and Phil. I hope you will come."

"Oh, yes!" said Audrey, "I am sure I shall be very glad."

Somehow she did not say it quite so brightly as Miss Burnaby could have wished,

but then Audrey was not a girl who ever did let you see so much of her feelings as some people. It was not Audrey who had done most of the weeping and wailing when poor Mr. Ferguson died. It was not Audrey who had talked the loudest about the exertions she intended to make for the family support, though in the end she had done more than any of them. It was not Audrey whose face would tell the brightest story, if ever she stood up at Dimplethorpe church altar, side by side with the man she loved best in all the world. People must take other people as they found them. So Miss Burnaby comforted herself. It would come right.

“I made Phil promise,” she said, “that the first evening he spent out at all, he would spend with us, and that is to-morrow night. And he is to bring some of his pictures to show us. I know that will be a treat for you. And you must bring some of

yours, too. He is sure to want to see them."

"Oh! *no*," said Audrey, most decidedly.

"And pray why not?"

"Because he did see a little sketch I was making at the Moat side, and what he said about it made me almost determine that I would never touch a paint-brush again."

"You little simpleton!" But Miss Burnaby was more than half glad that Audrey should think so much about Phil's opinion. "Why, if you always go by what people say of you and your doings, you will never know what it is to have a moment's peace. Phil may say what he likes, but you *do* draw beautifully; and Mrs. Haythorne knows it, too. She says she has never seen anyone with such an eye for colour as you have, and I should think Mrs. Haythorne has met as many artists and knows almost as much about them as Phil does. I shall tell Phil he may keep his opinions to

himself, if that is all the good he can do with them. You know he is going to live in his grandfather's cottage, Audrey?"

"Yes, and a very sensible thing, too, I thought."

"Of course. I always say it is far the wisest thing for a young man to go in at the narrow end of the trumpet. It is so much pleasanter to have plenty of space at the last. It won't make a bit of difference to what people will think of him, or, if it does, so much worse for the people. But I won't keep you now, for I know you always like to get home as fast as you can, and pin yourself down to that painting; but it really will not be a waste of time to-morrow, for looking at pictures is just as good as having a lesson, when you have once begun to learn."

"Especially when the looking makes you feel that you can never do anything worth looking at, yourself."

“There you are again ! I declare people, especially girls, never ought to be sent into the world with so little self-conceit as you have to bless yourself with. It is just like not having your proper number of skins, you are open to every scratch and pinch and rub that properly clothed people choose to give you. Just don’t give another thought to Master Phil’s opinions, but put on your grey muslin dress to-morrow, and I shall lend you some of my old cream-coloured lace, for it suits your complexion exactly, and we shall have time for a snug cup of tea together before Phil comes with his pictures. I asked him to come in good time, so that we might be able to see them by daylight.”

Audrey did come, and very pretty she looked in the grey muslin dress, with Miss Burnaby’s old Mechlin round her throat and wrists, and a knot of pink geranium in her

waistband, and another in the shining coils of her hair. If Phil thought she was as fair a picture as any of those in his portfolio, it was only a very proper thought to come into his mind, under the circumstances. He had found her ladylike enough when he met her a day or two before, down in the grassy hollow by the Moat House garden; but now he saw her in a fresh light. How exactly she seemed to fit into the pleasant surroundings of the Manor House people. What an air of *at-home-ness* there was about her, as if she had spent all her life with them, instead of amongst the bustle and noise and second-rate gentility of Rose Emma and Frances Ann and the rest of them.

And from whom had that gentle yet lofty bearing come to her, and could she really belong to the stout, fussy, commonplace Mrs. Ferguson, who had been so anxious for him to go and board at the house?

That thought came into Phil's mind as they were going to, dinner down the low wainscotted passage which led from the Manor House parlour to the dining-room. Audrey walked first with the old General. Phil had never seen anything prettier than the swaying grace of her figure as she moved along by the old man's side, her head just thrown back a little as she lifted it to him now and then. How everything about her seemed to put itself into soft flowing lines. There was nothing hard, nothing angular, in whatever she looked or did. And her voice, when she spoke, matched all the rest of her, for it was soft and harmonious too, so different from the loud ringing tones which he remembered so well at the Moat House.

It was a pleasant little foursquare dinner, the four people knowing all about each other, so that there was no putting on

of appearances, if anybody had been of the sort to put them on. Miss Burnaby was just like a bit of her own old china, slightly worn and chipped, but as dainty and delicate as ever, her wrinkles and spectacles and silver locks only adding to the beauty of the general appearance. And what a foil she and the grizzly old General made to the fair young loveliness of Audrey Ferguson, Audrey with the little tips of pink geranium peeping out amongst her rippled hair, and vying with the pink little ears which that hair half covered and half revealed. What a lady she looked, so quiet, so self-unconscious. Only she did not take quite enough notice of himself. She was not, or at any rate did not appear to be, quite so much interested as he could have wished in hearing all about what he had seen and done during those years of Italian and Parisian life. One might think she had

always been accustomed to talk to people who lived amongst that sort of thing, so easily and quietly did she take it, so little did she seem impressed by the fact that, after all, he had seen a little more of the world than herself.

Phil was not stuck-up. If he had been he would not have come back to Dimplethorpe at all, still less to old Ben Hathaway's cottage, where the baskets which his grandfather and himself had made were being daily used by Harriet Brown. No one could have been more humble in the presence of those who were his masters, no one more conscious of the past with those who had helped him to overcome its difficulties. But that was a different thing. Now Audrey brought out the other side of his character. With her he wanted to be master. She must at any rate own his superiority. That was why he had snubbed her drawings. He

wanted her to admire him, not to emulate him. She was most attractive to him when most conscious of his power to rule her, not only in art but in everything. So far as a certain meek submissiveness went, she had fascinated him more when he met her by the Moat side; for then, and still more when coloury Rose Emma and fussy Mrs. Ferguson came upon the scene, there was a sort of deprecatory manner about her, something which appealed to him for pity; whereas now she was in her own place, and when she looked at him at all, it was with a calm-eyed equality which was rather humbling than otherwise, but at the same time stimulating, for it gave him something to knock down. And viewed apart from his art-life, in which he was conscious enough of deficiency, Phil was a man who liked to have something to knock down.

Still it was a most pleasant evening,

and the best of it all came at the end.

For after dinner they went into the garden, and sat on the terrace in the August moonlight, the shadow of the vine leaves and the cluster roses straying over Audrey's dress. And though she scarcely spoke a word, she was pleasant to look at, and Phil made up his mind, as he watched her there, that whatever position he might one day be able to win for himself, would be adorned, and not marred, by her most womanly grace. Could any London drawing-room need a fairer form to flit about amongst its lamps and flowers and silks and satins and perfumes, than hers over which the moonlight was playing now as she sat half hidden amongst Miss Burnaby's roses?

And then with a sort of listless grace, which reminded him of an Italian girl, she rose, drawing herself to her full height, so that, as he lolled there on the garden seat, he

had quite to look up to her, and that showed him fresh beauty in her face. It was wonderful what fresh beauty he always was finding in it as she turned, now this way, now that, to talk sometimes to the old General, sometimes to little Miss Burnaby. This time it was to Miss Burnaby, to ask about going home.

“I promised Mamma I would not be late.”

“And you shall not, Audrey, my dear. I have no notion of young people keeping their elders up of nights. But you need not be afraid of that yet. Here, Hannah!”

And an old-fashioned housemaid, who was also taking a walk on her own side of the garden, came up. She was very much like Miss Burnaby, as a good sort of willow-pattern plate is like a piece of Nankin blue.

“Hannah, fetch Miss Ferguson’s hat and shawl.”

Which Hannah did, and Phil thought it was like a poem to see Audrey put them on. Truly the girl added grace to everything she did by her way of doing it.

And then came the finishing touch. For as Audrey stood there, drawing on her gloves, Miss Burnaby said,

“You will walk home with Miss Ferguson, will you not, Phil?”

It was the very thing Phil had been wishing all along. And he answered briskly enough, yet not so that Audrey should think him too eager. He had pride enough left to think of that. But the old General had a word to put in. He had forgotten the days when a moonlight walk of an August evening with a pretty girl used to be a pleasure to himself.

“Jane, you are such a one for sending people home early. I was going to take Phil into my room and have a cigar with

him. Why must he set off home at ten o'clock?"

"Because I don't want Audrey to go alone," said Miss Burnaby, with a look which told her brother as plainly as possible to mind his own business. "I told Audrey that there was no need for Mrs. Ferguson to send a servant, as Phil has to pass the house on his way to Harriet Brown's cottage. Phil can come and have a cigar to-morrow night, if you like."

"All right, Jane; then that's a bargain. You remember, Phil?"

"Thank you, General. I mean to give myself a week's holiday before I settle down to work, and you are helping me to spend it very happily."

And with that they all went towards the gate. A pleasant rosy glow was pouring from behind Mrs. Haythorne's curtained windows into the moonlight.

“Who lives there?” said Phil.

“Mrs. Haythorne, the cleverest woman in Dimplethorpe. I meant to have told you about her before,” Miss Burnaby replied.

“Oh! but I *have* heard about her. Audrey has told me. Why do you all think her so very wonderful? She is not the *only* lady in Dimplethorpe who knows how to paint a picture.”

This was for Audrey, but Audrey took no notice. This was Phil’s company way of putting things, no doubt. In private he had not by any means told her that she knew how to paint a picture. It was left to Miss Burnaby to explain.

“It isn’t only her knowing how to paint a picture, but she is so very clever and fascinating in every way. Now is she not, Jack?”

“Who are you talking about,” said the old man.

“Mrs. Haythorne. Did you not say, when

you saw her, that she was the handsomest woman in Dimplethorpe?"

"Yes, I did, and I stick to it. If I *could* be a young man again."

"But you can't, Jack, and so it is no use talking nonsense," said Jane, who only wished Phil to be particularly struck with the charms of one face just then. However it would be a great advantage for him to become acquainted with Mrs. Haythorne, both because of the polishing influence which a clever woman of society has upon a young man who is not much accustomed as yet to that society, and also because, if he became intimate at Meadowfield Lodge, it would involve his meeting Audrey more frequently amongst the refined surroundings which suited her so well.

"She says she should like to know you, Phil, and I promised I would go over with you some afternoon. Shall we say to-

morrow? There is nothing like beginning early."

"Thank you. I shall be very glad."

"Then call here about half-past three, and we will go together. Good night."

"Good night," said Phil, "and thank you for one of the pleasantest evenings I ever spent."

"I hope you will have many more as pleasant, now that you are settled amongst us," said little Miss Burnaby as she shut the gate after them, and watched them going leisurely down the shadowed road which led into the village. Things appeared promising, so far, and Audrey had looked her best, though she said little. But then Audrey never did say much.

## CHAPTER VI.

JUST those two, sauntering leisurely down the lane, for Phil took care that it should not be anything more than a saunter. No need to waste that sweet moonlight in anything like sharp, business-like activity.

Audrey was very silent. However that was much better than if she had chattered away with the self-possession of either of her sisters. Was it shyness, was it embarrassment? Did she know what he had said to Mrs. Ferguson three years ago, and was she thinking of that? Or was she a little

bit vexed at what he had said to her about her painting? For when he had tried to smooth it over during their conversation about this Mrs. Haythorne, she had taken no notice. But Phil was not going to have that walk to the Moat House all wasted in silence. To have Audrey beside him was pleasant, but to find out a little of her thoughts about himself would be pleasanter still.

“Audrey.”

“Yes.”

“Don’t you remember, a long time ago, you promised to paint me a picture?”

“Yes, I do.”

Audrey said it with just the least little touch of wounded pride, and at the same time she drew herself half imperceptibly away from him.

Phil was not displeased at that. He knew what it meant. Audrey had been

touched by his exceedingly frank criticism of her productions. It was satisfactory to think that he could touch her in any way.

“Did you keep your promise, Audrey?”

“Yes, of course I did.”

“Well then, the next time I come to the Moat House, you must bring it out and show it to me.”

“I did it ever so many times,” said Audrey, “because, every time I finished one sketch, I thought I could make it so much better if I tried again.”

“And so you reached perfection at last. Reached it, at least, in your own opinion.”

Phil wanted to tease her into saying something. No consequence if it was something sharp, so long as she broke that tiresome silence.

“No, I did not, not even in my own opinion.”

“That is right. I am glad to see you

know there is a difference between your own opinion of perfection, and perfection itself. It is not everyone who knows so much as that. Then when I come again, you will let me see what you think the best one."

"No, I shall not."

"Why not?"

"Because that night, after what you said to me, I tore it up."

"Audrey, did you really do that?"

"Yes, I did. You may come and see the pieces, if you like."

And Audrey's voice really was grieved now. It sounded as if very little more would make her cry.

Phil took hold of her arm and made her come nearer to him.

"You foolish child, whatever did you do that for? As if people always meant everything that they said. Why, if I had known you would have taken it to heart so, I

would have told you the biggest story in the world rather than that you should have gone and torn up your work in discouragement. Poor Audrey !”

And yet nothing could have pleased Phil half so well. Not that Audrey should love art so as to be content with nothing short of the best ; but the tearing up of the picture on which she had spent so much time, showed his power over her, and Phil was one of those men in whom love grows up out of the sense of power. Then if the man is a true man, the love, as it grows, blossoms into that protection which is the finest chivalry. If he is not a true man, it rots into tyranny. But the consciousness of power, power to hurt or power to shield a feebler one, is at the root, either of the tyranny or the chivalry.

“ What did you do that for, Audrey ?”

Phil knew well enough, but there was a

subtle pleasure in making Audrey say it.

"I did it because I had no more satisfaction in the thing."

"Then why did you keep the pieces? I should have thought in that case you would have thrown them away."

Audrey walked on, half vexed, half happy, and wholly silent.

"Did you do it in a passion, because you were angry with me?"

"Perhaps I did."

"No, you didn't, Audrey."

And there was a subtle tone of tenderness in Phil's voice. "You did it because you felt I was your master. You know that, Audrey."

"No, I didn't," said Audrey desperately. "Of course you know a great deal more about painting than I do."

"Oh! and is *that* all?"

Audrey was silent.

“Tell me, Audrey, is *that* all ?

But Audrey would not tell him. Instead, she only drew herself a little away, and he followed her. He would have put his arm round her, there and then, and drawn her close to him, this girl so gentle, yet so resistant, with a sort of pliant resoluteness about her, yet meek enough to give him a sense of authority. With what gentle masterfulness he would rule her, when, one of these days he should bid her and she would come, as come he knew she would.

For there was no uncertainty in Phil's mind about that, about Audrey coming to him so soon as he should choose to ask her. Indeed, if his own mind had been sufficiently made up, and if his prospects had been sufficiently promising, he would, without further ado, have said to her, as she stepped there by his side in the clear August moonlight,

“Audrey, come to me and be my wife. We belong to each other.”

And she would have done as he bade her. But his circumstances did not quite justify him as yet in making such a proposal. And besides, there was a sort of zest in this playing at love, this toying with his own hopes and expectations, before they had bound him, by their actual expression, to any definite course.

Audrey stepped on a little, and said in a matter-of-fact way,

“I suppose you do not see any great changes in Dimplethorpe? Things are very much the same as they used to be, except that the Squire has sold some of his land and Meadowfield Lodge is built.”

“Oh come, Audrey,” and Phil made her bring back her pace to his own, “we are not drifting off into generalities in that way. I did not refuse the General’s offer of a cigar

and a chat in the library, for the sake of being asked if I saw any change in Dimplethorpe. Of *course* it is just the same. What I am more interested in knowing is, whether you are just the same. And I think you are."

"Well, yes," said Audrey, with just a touch of sauciness. "As Miss Burnaby remarked, things do not grow so quickly here as they do in London or Paris. A good conceit of oneself, for instance."

Phil laughed. That was exactly what he wanted, to be met on his own ground sometimes. One does not want always nothing but submissiveness.

"I daresay you are right, Audrey. I have a very good conceit of myself in one particular, namely, that I can teach *you* a great many things which you are very ignorant about now. For one thing, I mean to teach you to draw a proper picture

of that castle across the moat. I shall make you go down with me every day, and try and try, and tear up every bad sketch until you have made a good one. In the meantime you can go on teaching that little lad—what is his name, Victor?”

“Of course I shall do that. One must live.”

“Very much of course. And it is a very good thing you have to do something, or there would be no such thing as managing you. It seems to me that you are suffering from an excess of determination of character. Don’t you think so?”

“It seems to me that just at this moment I am suffering from not being able to walk as fast as I like. I have got into the habit, you know, of walking quickly, because I always want to get there and back again.”

“A very good reason, especially when

one knows where the particular *there* is. But as I have no wish to get anywhere just now, you will please to walk a little more slowly. Unless you prefer to go on by yourself."

"Very well."

And Audrey walked briskly forward, having just so much coquettishness in her nature as to make her feel sure that Phil would hasten his pace too, which he did.

"Audrey, you are the most provoking creature. Do be sensible now. Let us have some conversation."

"Very well. I want to tell you about Mrs. Haythorne."

"Oh! bother Mrs. Haythorne! I meant let us have some conversation about our own affairs, but, if you won't do that, well then go on about Mrs. Haythorne. Is she really so very nice?"

"You will soon find that out for yourself

when you have once seen her. I know she has made a very great difference in my life. You will not need to ask anyone, to-morrow at this time, whether Mrs. Haythorne is nice or not."

"You said she wanted to see me."

"Yes, she always likes to talk to anyone about painting, and there isn't anyone else here to talk to her about it. She said she was reckoning so much upon seeing you. You must ask her to let you see some of her own pictures, and you must show her some of yours."

"Oh, nonsense! If she knows very much about paintings, she will soon find that mine leave a great deal to be desired. They really do, Audrey."

"That is quite possible."

"Now you are at it again, Audrey. I only mean that I am not such a conceited fellow as you might think I am. And I

don't want anybody—at least I don't want Mrs. Haythorne to think better of me than I deserve."

"I think she finds out people pretty well. But one always seems at one's best with her. She has a way of bringing out what you know, and she always listens with interest to anything you have to say. One seems to have some thoughts in talking to her."

"I should think *you* might manage to feel that in talking to anybody, Audrey. But here, thanks to your steam-walking, we have got to the Moat House, and I meant to have been half an hour longer at the very least. It is all your own fault, you might have had more of my company if you had chosen. I will not come in to-night, thank you."

"I did not ask you."

"No, but of course you would have done, if I had not told you it would be of no use.

But I am not going to quarrel with you about that. Good night, Audrey."

And he held her hand closely for awhile, then let it slide away, touching it down to the very tips of the long fingers.

"You have such pretty hands, Audrey."

But she only bade him a grave good night and was gone.

## CHAPTER VII.

PHIL did not feel disposed to go to the cottage. He sauntered across the chapel-yard, and down to the moat, to that bit of shelving ground which had been his studio in the old times with Mr. Ferguson.

Watching there, he could see by-and-by a light in Audrey's window, and by-and-by Audrey's shadow on the blind, first flitting about, then motionless, at least as much of it as he could distinguish, which was only the pretty head half-bent, and the loose hair flowing from it.

Was Audrey reading a book of devotions?

No, he thought not. He thought she was most likely thinking about himself.

He had flung himself at once into the position he meant to keep. He wanted her to know, once for all, what was really in his mind, though he might not be able to say it in words just then. She must have known that he was in earnest. Simple, guileless as she was, there was a dignity about Audrey Ferguson, which would have driven back any man who she fancied was only playing with her. What power of silent contempt there was in her look and voice and manner, if she had only chosen to put it forth ! But, instead of using any such sharp-edged weapon upon himself, she had been so meek and gentle, except sometimes, when with a pretty raillery which was almost better in its way than either meekness or gentleness, she had turned round upon him and showed him enough of what there was in her, to

warn him that he must expect a blow in return if he took too much upon himself.

Quiet little Audrey ! For one had to call her little, though when she rose slowly to that full graceful height of hers, she was almost divinely tall, as certainly she was most divinely fair. And that made it all the pleasanter for him to think that he had such power over her, and could dare to talk to her with that sense of being the master.

“Good night, Audrey,” he said, as he stood there by the moat side amongst the whispering reeds. “Take care of the bits of those pictures which you tore up for my sake. Some day we will make sweeter ones.”

And then he turned away and went across the osier flats to Harriet Brown’s cottage.

Everything seemed to bring back the old days to him. Here amongst the willows, he had first seen her when she was indeed little

Audrey, half hidden by the tall yellow irises. And he was going home to the cottage, and he should go up the dark stair on which her little feet had stumbled that day, so many years ago, when she came like a gleam of sunshine into the big upper room, with its bundles of osiers and half-finished pictures. Phil had the blue sash yet, which she left behind her then. Some day he should show her it, and tell her all it had been to him. But not just yet.

Year by year he went over those years. The only part of any of them which he could not remember quite comfortably was the night when he came to say good-bye to Mrs. Ferguson, after he had won the prize which took him to Paris and Rome. He had a feeling of annoyance when he recalled himself sitting in the parlour, facing Mrs. Ferguson with her fierce scarlet cap-strings, and asking so meekly if he might be

allowed to write occasionally to "Miss Ferguson," with a view to the correspondence issuing in an engagement. Could he really be the same Phil Hathaway who had shuffled and fidgeted so, and dangled his Scotch cap by its long ribbons, after the fashion of the bridegroom in *Young Lochinvar*? For he had felt so very very small then, as he listened to the words of fate which fell from Mrs. Ferguson's lips, when she told him that she thought it was rather a piece of impertinence on his part to make such a request, seeing that his prospects were so very uncertain, and that anyone to whom he engaged himself would probably have to wait such a long time before the engagement issued in anything more satisfactory.

"But still we have every respect, Phil; only, with the position my husband has in Dimplethorpe, it isn't quite what we could have looked to for our eldest daughter.

But if you are of the same mind when you come back."

"Which I shall be," Phil had said, so boldly.

And he was. But he was not minded to go and ask Mrs. Ferguson quite so meekly now. Phil shrugged his shoulders when he thought about it. He wished he could sweep away everything in the Moat House, except Audrey herself. Those vexing accessories to an otherwise pleasant past were like the fly in the apothecary's ointment. Did Audrey know? Had her mother told her? Mrs. Ferguson was a woman who talked about everything. She would scarcely let that alone. And if so, perhaps it was the remembrance of it which gave to Audrey's manner that slight touch of independence which kept cropping up so unexpectedly through her gentleness. Perhaps she wished to let him know that, if he did not happen

to be in the same mind, it was of no consequence. Foolish child! How soon he could make her think differently! For he was sure Audrey loved him, whether she would own it to herself or not.

He had nothing to do, and the night was calm and still, and so he went back down the road to the Manor House, for the sake of recalling what had happened at each point of it as he took Audrey home. Here, by this old thorn-bush, he had said that rather bold thing about being her master. Here, where the elm-trees bent together over an old well by the wayside, she had quickened her steps and gone away from him, in that pretty, half-coquettish way. It was very seldom Audrey showed any coquetry, but when she did one wished she would always keep in that mood, it was so piquant and irresistible. Here she had spoken to him with her first little touch of sauciness, and

here her voice had melted down until he could almost hear the tears in it.

What a pity she had all those commonplace people belonging to her! What a weariness her home-life must often be! But he could make it so different when he had taken his place as a London artist, and could give her a position in London society. How proud he would be of her then, for of course he should make her dress artistically, and drop a few of her simple country ways, or rather they would drop of themselves when she was once afloat in fashionable life.

But would Mrs. Ferguson frequently want to come up to town to visit her married daughter? And would Cousin Tholthorpe yearn after the May meetings? And Rose Emma and Frances Ann. When they had a sister married in London, they would naturally think they had a right to come whenever they liked to see the sights, a

couple of hours on that wretched East Warrenshire line bringing them into the very heart of Belgravia. Fancy Rose Emma and Frances Ann, all chignon and pink ribbon, going through the Royal Academy, looking out for his pictures. Or dressed in more than the colours of the rainbow, put together by the Dimplethorpe milliner, sallying forth with Audrey to return the calls which would doubtless be made upon her, as the wife of one of the most rising artists of the day. Phil shrugged his shoulders again.

“But Queen Audrey is worth it all.”

Phil, not thinking what he was about, said this quite loud, as he strolled past Meadowfield Lodge. And he was vexed enough with himself for doing it, for a lady, who apparently found the August moonlight as peaceful and pleasant as he did, was sauntering up and down the little lawn in front of the house, and, if she heard

him, would think him slightly out of his mind.

Could it be Mrs. Haythorne? Phil did not look. Finding that he was so much nearer his own kind than he expected, he hurried past and walked briskly on for about a mile. Coming back half an hour afterwards, the lady was sitting in her verandah, with a lamp on a table beside her. Phil knew that with the light in her eyes she would not see him, so he glanced across as he passed the second time, and then was sure that it must be Mrs. Haythorne, for she was dark, and had the large brown eyes and finely marked brows which Miss Burnaby had admired so much. The crimson curtain of one of the windows opening into the verandah was partly drawn aside; Phil could see a gleam of picture-frames and statues and vases within, and flowers trailing down from brackets on the wall. It was a pretty

sight, reminding him of the outdoor life he had been accustomed to in the south, only that there was neither laugh nor song nor guitar. Mrs. Haythorne sat there all alone. Phil thought how pleasant it would have been if he and Audrey could have joined her, and had a chat about art, there in the moonlight. Or if even Audrey had not been there, it would still have been pleasant. Because, as Mrs. Haythorne had expressed herself as anxious to make his acquaintance, there would be no stiffness to overcome. It made such a difference when people had heard of each other beforehand, and so were prepared to be friendly.

## CHAPTER VIII.

TRUE to appointment, Phil made his appearance next afternoon at the Manor House, prepared to accompany Miss Burnaby on the proposed visit to Meadowfield Lodge.

“But you must go round first and look at my ribbon borders,” said the little lady, leading the way down the trim laurel walk of the front garden to what she called her *pleasaunce* at the south end, hidden from the road by those sycamore trees, one of which had been blown down the very morning that Dr. Fylingdale’s new villa received its finishing touches.

As he was admiring the lobelias and foliage plants, and all the rest of the garden favourites; there was a glint of vapoury grey muslin through the gap in the sycamore trees, then a gleam of blue ribbon, and Audrey, with a smile for Miss Burnaby, went past on her way to the Moat House. She could not have seen Phil, as he was down on his knees just then, saying polite things to the white nemophilas, but he just caught a glimpse of her light brown hair as she passed, and was conscious of a little feeling of disappointment, not to say vexation, that, knowing his intention of calling upon Mrs. Haythorne that afternoon, she had not staid, as Miss Burnaby said she very often did, and so allowed him the pleasure of seeing her again.

Miss Burnaby was disappointed too. Perhaps Mrs. Haythorne had not pressed her to stay. One could not always tell.

And Audrey never would stay unless she was asked, asked cordially too. Humble as the girl seemed, she was as proud as Lucifer with respect to anything that touched her position with people who might be considered her superiors in social standing.

"That is Audrey Ferguson," she said, when the gleam of grey muslin and blue ribbon was at a safe distance. "You find her much improved, do you not?"

"Of course I do," said Phil. "She is such a little lady. Except that she is *not* little."

"Yes; the wonder to me is, where it all comes from. But you know, Phil," and Miss Burnaby dropped her voice almost mysteriously, "it is my belief, and has been for a long time, that she must be a changeling. Of course the General laughs at me, and I laugh at myself too, but I shouldn't a bit wonder if in Belgravia now some fashion-

able mamma is mourning over a stumpy eldest daughter with a wonderful resemblance to Rose Emma or Frances Ann, and asking herself where the round face and wide shoulders and button nose have come from. One does see that sort of thing, however, sometimes in families, and Audrey has enough of her father, both in appearance and disposition, to satisfy anybody that she really does belong to him."

"It is almost a pity she has to live amongst her own people," said Phil, "when she is so different from them. Their ways must be a constant irritation to her."

"Perhaps. Still one must do the best one can. I believe Mrs. Ferguson is a very kind woman."

And Miss Burnaby did not pursue the subject. Probably, if Phil had any people of his own and had been obliged to live amongst them, he would have found their

ways a constant irritation, too. Still he had shown a fine independence in coming back to Dimplethorpe under the circumstances, and she honoured him for it.

Mrs. Haythorne was at home. More than that, she had staid at home on purpose. For, as she told Miss Burnaby, she was going over to London with the Major, to see a lawn-tennis match, but when the note came, proposing a visit from Mr. Hathaway, she persuaded the Major to go alone, as she did not wish to defer, even for a single day, the pleasure she had been looking forward to ever since she had heard about Mr. Hathaway.

“Oh, no! I assure you I did not care for it one bit,” she said, in reply to Phil’s expressions of regret that their call should have interfered with any previous arrangements. “Major Haythorne was quite willing to go alone. Of course I would not

let him put off the engagement on my account. Besides, Mr. Hathaway, though I do not want you to look upon me as a flatterer, I must tell you that I would far rather have a chat with anyone who is fond of painting than go to half a dozen lawn-tennis matches. One does get so tired of them. I have really been counting the weeks until I could see you, ever since Miss Burnaby first mentioned your name."

Phil was pleased. How could he help it? For he had not often been in the way of such pleasant speeches from ladies' lips. And Mrs. Haythorne did not look like a woman who was in the habit of making pleasant speeches simply for the sake of making them. Instead, there was a sort of lofty indifference about her manner, when the conversation turned upon anything in which she was not interested. Evidently she did not care to make herself particularly

agreeable unless her heart was in what she happened to be talking about. Did she like Dimplethorpe? Oh, yes! the place would do very well, and she said so with a bored, weary expression. Did she find the church services to her taste? Quite passably so. Had she enjoyed her residence in India? Well, yes, to a certain extent. There were quantities of pretty things to be picked up, and any number of fine buildings to be seen, if one cared to take the trouble. Did she have a pleasant journey through Europe? Not very. She never did enjoy the Continent very much, indeed she never did enjoy anything very much, except staying at home and painting.

And then she turned those large brown eyes, which were sometimes so bright and vivacious, and sometimes so full of listless melancholy, upon Mr. Hathaway, and asked him whether he did not think the

chief end of life was achieved when one could sit still and paint pictures.

“Or *look* them,” Phil could have answered. For Mrs. Haythorne was a picture in herself, more like some of the high-born women he had admired at a respectful distance in picture-galleries or Roman Catholic churches; women who seem to move about in their stateliness and beauty, apart from other people, only just giving you a glimpse now and then, by look and smile and tone, of how much they could be to you if they chose.

And then she drifted into a long talk with Phil about Italy and art. About the latter she seemed to know as much as he did himself. At any rate she could talk about it with as much taste and discrimination. Here was no one who required to be condescended to and patronised as a learner. Whatever else Mrs. Haythorne might do,

she would certainly never tear up any productions of hers, because Mr. Phil Hathaway happened to set the seal of his disapproval upon them. No ; Phil must lay aside his airs of masterhood now. And he was beginning to feel how pleasant it is to lay such airs aside, when it can be done in the presence of superior refinement and cultivation.

Then all Mrs. Haythorne's surroundings were in such perfect keeping. How could she have contrived to make that brand-new house, with its red bricks and stucco facings, look so like a home into which the life and thought and associations of long years past had entered ? Even the very plants and flowers seemed as if they had done double duty in growing. Already that little verandah into which the drawing-room opened, and in which he had seen Mrs. Haythorne seated the night before, was a

perfect bower of greenery, with bright touches of geranium and heliotrope, which sent their glow of colour and perfume into the room, whenever a chance breeze blew the rosy curtains aside for a moment.

And that room. One could look at it, and look and look again, and not find out where the charm was, except that it was different from everyone else's room. Those were the days of aniline dyes. People stuffed out of sight their beautiful faded old damasks, and hung their drawing-rooms with colours which were enough to make one's eyes ache. Mrs. Ferguson's drawing-room, the only one in Dimplethorpe, except Miss Burnaby's, which Phil had seen yet, had burst, on the occasion of Frances Ann's marriage, into a splendour of bright green drapery, which was only equalled by white and flowery paper hangings, also new. And

Phil had felt, when he went into it that night with Audrey, as if everything in the room was flinging itself at him. There was such an impression of noise and bustle in the very colouring of the place. But Mrs. Haythorne sat amongst soft neutral shades like latest autumn tints, or the very earliest brown buds of spring, relieved here and there by dashes of brilliant colour, where a bit of oriental metal work or Japanese embroidery asserted itself. And her dress was some soft indescribable mixture of blue and green, which seemed as if it might have been copied from the bloom of wild hyacinths amongst the grass upon which the last year's leaves were lying; and as its folds changed with her changing movements, new depths and tints of colour came out, so that one could never tell whether the wild hyacinths, or the last year's leaves, or the tender grass, had the mastery in them. Surely there

must be something very strong in the individuality which could impress itself so upon everything around it. This was no work of the milliner and upholsterer; it was the woman herself, living in everything which she permitted to come near her.

“Oh, no! you are not going yet,” she said, as Miss Burnaby, after what for her had been a remarkably quiet call, made a move to depart. “I cannot think of such a thing as your going yet. Sit down again.”

And with pretty playfulness she rose and put Miss Burnaby back into her chair.

“You need not think that I am going to let you escape a cup of my real Himalayan tea. Don’t you remember you promised me ever so long ago you would give me your opinion upon it?”

“So I did,” said Miss Burnaby, not unwilling to stay a little longer, only sorry

that Audrey was not there to take up the ball of conversation with Phil, when Mrs. Haythorne found time to speak to herself. "But you need not expect that I can give you much of an opinion about it. I know when the water has boiled, and that is about all I do know. Now if it had been a bit of china."

"Yes. And people who know a good bit of china, always know a good cup of tea, whether they give themselves credit for it or not. It is a curious thing, but the two gifts, if one may call them such, invariably go together. You must come some day, Miss Burnaby, and look at my china, but Mr. Hathaway will despise us if we begin to talk about it now."

"No, no, you need not protest," she said, as Phil was beginning to clear himself from any such iniquitous intentions, or even capabilities. "I never knew a clever man

yet, who had patience with a woman when she had got on the subject of her china, and I do not want to frighten you away just yet. Ring the bell for me, please."

## CHAPTER IX.

PHIL found it, after an embarrassing search, amongst a lot of peacock feather fans and Indian embroideries, in a little recess. He had been accustomed to look for bells where he found them in Mrs. Ferguson's parlour, well set forward on each side of the mantelshelf. And he felt irritated now, not with himself, but with the Moat House people, for getting him into the way of looking for bells in places where people of refinement and cultivation did not put them. To relieve the awkward pause, Mrs. Haythorne entered into conversation again with Miss Burnaby.

“You know you have scarcely spoken a word to me yet.”

That was true, but it was not Miss Burnaby's fault. She had spoken whenever she could get a word in, which was not very often, for Mrs. Haythorne and Phil seemed so interested in the topics they were discussing; and she did not care much for pictures herself, unless they were painted by her own friends. But then Miss Burnaby felt that this was not her visit at all. She had merely come to introduce Phil, and she was delighted to see how well they were getting on together. If he became pleasantly intimate at the Lodge, it would be a delightful way of seeing more of Audrey, without being annoyed by the unrefined associations of her own home. Miss Burnaby could afford to sacrifice herself—and in her case it really *was* a sacrifice—by dropping into the background now and

then, for the sake of anyone in whom she took an interest.

And Mrs. Haythorne, whilst Phil was looking for the bell, began to talk about Audrey.

“You have done me such a kindness by telling me about her. I really do not know now what I should do without her. She is quite like a sister to me.”

That was what Mrs. Haythorne had said she hoped Audrey would be. But then people do not always act according to what they say. Mrs. Haythorne had. Miss Burnaby was delighted.

“I am sure I am very glad. It is so kind of you.”

“Not at all. It is all for my own interest. You cannot imagine what a difference there is already in Victor. You know he used to drive poor Mathilde almost wild, for I make it a rule never to interfere with

anyone who has the management of him. I think people who have been all their lives accustomed to children, ought to know a great deal more about them than I do myself. But I assure you that description of Chaos at the beginning of Haydn's *Creation* was nothing to the impression produced upon me every time I looked inside the schoolroom door."

"Poor little Victor ! What a very bad training for him."

"I daresay it was. But it is really a new created world which has sprung up at Miss Ferguson's command. And so quietly as it has come to pass. The bell is behind those fans, Mr. Hathaway ; no, you stupid man. I don't mean the fans on the chimneypiece. I mean those Indian ones in the recess. I do beg your pardon for calling you stupid. I dare say you are accustomed to see bells near the chimneypiece."

Phil coloured, thinking that doubtless bells near the chimney-piece must be a sign of want of cultivation. And again harsh thoughts of Mrs. Ferguson crossed his mind. But the summons was given at last, and, greatly relieved, he returned to his seat, Mrs. Haythorne beginning again about pictures as soon as he was able to listen. She certainly had, as Audrey had remarked, a wonderful tact in finding out what people knew, and enabling them to display it to the best advantage.

A servant, who seemed to know what was wanted, came in with a tray of the quaintest little Chinese cups and saucers, whose soft warm harmony of colour matched the softness and warmth and harmony of everything else in the room.

Phil could scarcely tell how it was that he felt so much at home. Even that little awkwardness about the bell had only been

an occasion for fresh kindness on Mrs. Haythorne's part. Generally it was a difficult thing for him to feel at home in other people's houses. He was conscious, especially with ladies, of a certain want of polish in his manners. He never could do the right thing in the right place. He thought afterwards of clever speeches that he might have made, witty retorts, sparkling repartees; but then as he *only* thought about them afterwards, never at the time, they were of no more use than matches without anything to strike them upon. Now here, with Mrs. Haythorne, it was so different. All that was best in him came out. Instead of doing himself an injustice by silence or shyness, he felt almost a sort of inspiration in expressing his thoughts; and more than that, he felt that what he said was being listened to by one who could appreciate it.

Audrey had told him much, but she had not told him the half of what Mrs. Haythorne really was. He almost wished now, though not quite—that he had let her talk on as much as she liked about her new friend, instead of bringing her back again and again to the personalities which at the time seemed so delightful. They *were* delightful, but still he could have indulged in them on some other occasion; whereas, if she had gone on talking about Mrs. Haythorne, he would have known better what subjects of conversation to introduce now.

And it was important, in talking to Mrs. Haythorne, to know what subjects to choose; for such a change passed over her if anything was started which she did not care about. The warm light died out of her face, the friendly tone from her voice, her smile was simply that of the polished woman of society. She was courteous, but that was all. And

then Phil felt ashamed of himself, and ill at ease, and afraid that he was not producing a favourable impression.

She looked very handsome now, her jewelled hands moving about amongst the rare old china, the rosy light from the crimson blinds playing to and fro upon her exquisitely shaped head. What a little head she had ! But then Phil had read somewhere that very refined women always did have little heads. And those great brown eyes. What a look of weariness in them sometimes, which made one sorry for her, and anxious to do something, one knew not what, to help her.

That was just what Miss Burnaby had felt, the first time she saw Mrs. Haythorne in church. The General had felt it too, and Phil was feeling it now ; only with him it was as yet almost overpowered by that other feeling of anxiety to produce a favourable

impression, and also of delight in being appreciated and sympathised with.

“You must not be long before you come again,” she said, holding Miss Burnaby’s hand in hers, but rather looking towards Phil in saying it, as Miss Burnaby made a third and finally successful effort to say good-bye. They had been more than an hour, a time which might have been considered rather out of bounds for a first call.

“It is very good indeed of you to have staid so long,” she continued, “and with nobody but myself to entertain you. You really must bring him again, Miss Burnaby. I believe Major Haythorne goes down for the shooting into Scotland very soon, and then I shall be quite by myself. I have asked Miss Ferguson to stay with me altogether, whilst he is away, you know she is such an interesting companion, but then she is with Victor all the day, so that I am not

very much better off. Will you spare me another day next week?"

"I am sure I will with the very greatest pleasure," said Miss Burnaby. "I will come whenever you like."

"And you, Mr. Hathaway, if you are not too busy. I shall be so pleased if you will come too. We shall have a little more time then, and I will show you a few of my poor performances—that is, if you will promise not to criticise them too severely."

As if Phil could ever criticise anything done by so superior a woman! He was not likely to err in that direction, and if he said so with a little more *gaucherie* and shyness than Mrs. Haythorne was accustomed to, she made allowances for him. She had such a pleasant, affable manner with persons in whom she was really interested, not appearing to notice anything but what was charming in them.

"Then shall we say next Thursday?" she asked.

"It will suit me very well indeed," said little Miss Burnaby.

Mrs. Haythorne's beautiful eyes asked the same question of Mr. Hathaway, and Mr. Hathaway said, with all his heart in his words, that he should only be too delighted to come.

And with that Mrs. Haythorne let them depart.

"Well, Phil," said Miss Burnaby as they crossed the road to the Manor House. "What do you think of our new friend?"

"Think of her? Why, I think she is simply perfect, and so is everything about her. That is what I think."

"I do not think she is *quite* perfect," said the General's sister, remembering the stony expression of those lovely eyes when Mrs. Haythorne turned them upon the Major, "but I do think she is one of the most fasci-

nating women I have ever seen. What a pity she has not more companionship in her husband !”

“ Her husband ? Dear me ! I had quite forgotten about her husband. Indeed I am not sure that I knew she had one. I suppose Audrey must have told me, though. What sort of a man is he ? Quite a gentleman ?”

“ Oh ! dear, yes ; quite. His father was in the same regiment as the General. Major Haythorne is a most gentlemanly man, and as kind as possible to his wife, I should think. I daresay he lets her do whatever she likes. But I never saw such an uninteresting man, when once you have done admiring the outside of him. I don’t think he has as many brains as you could put on the point of a penknife. He dresses to perfection, and when you have said that, you have said everything.”

“ Poor thing !”

“Do you mean poor Major or poor Mrs. Haythorne?”

“I don’t know; I think I meant the Major, but of course it applies to them both.”

“Yes, of course. Shall you come in?”

“No, thank you. I really must go home and look over my pictures, and try to set to work. One must not let all the days slip away so.”

“Quite right. Then we meet again next Thursday.”

“Yes, under the same circumstances.”

Under better, Miss Burnaby hoped, because perhaps Miss Ferguson would be there. But she did not say so. She carefully abstained from mentioning Audrey’s name, except as if by chance, though her kind little heart was full of all manner of good wishes for them both. It would be so very delightful if only things would fall out in that way.

## CHAPTER X.

PHIL took his way homewards.

It was the same road down which he had sauntered the night before, after taking Audrey home, and retracing his steps for the purpose of remembering how she had looked, and spoken, and acted at each particular spot. His thoughts were rather different now ; and, as he was walking along in the broad open daylight, he could not stop so frequently to remember Audrey or anyone else.

Still, without doing anything which would make the good folk of Dimplethorpe think he was out of his mind, he could saunter

along leisurely enough, and retire into the solitude of his own thoughts sufficiently to live over again every incident of that pleasant hour at Meadowfield Lodge.

Poor Mrs. Haythorne ! For a woman like her, so full of artistic feeling, and of enthusiasm for everything noble, to be tied down to a man who had no more soul than sufficed for the adjusting of his collar and wristbands. Phil found himself kicking up the gravel in indignation at the very thought.

That accounted, then, for the weary coldness of her face when it fell into repose. And that accounted, too, for the eager way in which she caught at any idea with which she could have sympathy. How hungry she must be for companionship sometimes, how intellectually lonely in this sleepy little village, where there could be no one like-minded with herself.

For Audrey, who had been spoken of with so much affectionateness whilst he was engaged in looking for that bell amongst the feather fans, though she had a nature much above her own surroundings, had yet a certain northern coldness and restraint about her. One felt, if not actually heart to heart with her, an absence of enthusiasm. She said what she had to say with graceful calmness, which, in general society, never varied at all. It was only when you got very close to Audrey that you could bring out those finer tones of her nature. Whereas Mrs. Haythorne, under that very thin film of reserve which one felt with her at first, had an eager, impulsive disposition which seemed to be stretching out for sympathy, and ready to fasten upon it so hungrily.

What an influence she could be to anyone !  
What an education it must be to pass much

time in her company ! Why, even to look at her was like studying a picture. Phil seemed to himself to have passed into a different world since he had known her. With Audrey Ferguson he had a keen, delicious sense of masterhood. He could make her do what he liked, and feel as he chose. With Miss Burnaby one had a pleasant consciousness of firelight warmth and comfort, in which one could stretch oneself and be at ease. But with Mrs. Haythorne, Phil could only be shy and humble. Somehow she made him feel that he knew so little, and yet the little that he did know she brought out with such tact and skill that he almost lost the sense of shame he might otherwise have had at its exceeding smallness.

However, as he said to himself sensibly enough, Mrs. Haythorne might be beautiful and intellectual and enthusiastic ; she was

not so for him. The time had not yet come when he could shake hands on familiar terms with even the wives of Majors in the Indian service. The odour of the willow wands was about him still, and no one could make him feel that more keenly than this dainty lady, if by so much as a single hair's breadth he stepped beyond the place in which her kindness had set him. He was a young man of low birth and very humble surroundings, but nature had endowed him with a fine feeling for Art, and a little skill in rendering that feeling into pictures ; and on that account Mrs. Haythorne might find him pleasant to talk to for an hour, now and then, her own proper companions not having much gift in that direction. But when she had done with him he must quietly drop back into his place.

Phil looked at his hands. The fingers

were stunted with working at the osiers in his boyhood, the nails were broadened and flattened by the same employment. They would never be anything else now. His history was written upon them plainly enough. Basketmaker; that was all.

But if circumstances had given him the fingers of a basketmaker, heaven had not given him a basketmaker's soul. And what he had done for himself already, was only an earnest of what will and energy and perseverance, joined with that diviner artistic feeling within him, should one day bring to pass.

This thought drove Phil along into a sort of hurried, impetuous half run, of which he was wholly unconscious, until brought to a halt by a loud cheery voice.

"Deary me ! Mr. Hathaway, is that you ? I always knew you were a little bit short-sighted, but I never thought you were

quite blind. I hope nothing is the matter."

It was Mrs. Ferguson who said this. And Phil, pulling himself together and awakening to external influences, found that he was just stumbling over the Moat House doorstep as the minister's widow was coming to it from the other side.

Before he had time to reply, she continued in her brisk, voluble way.

"I daresay you were pretty much taken up with your own thoughts, and not quite settled down, as I daresay you are not just yet; of course there is a deal to think about. But anyhow I am glad to see you. I was saying to Audrey only this morning, I was a little bit surprised you hadn't looked in upon us before. Unless it was that you were forgetting old friends."

For Mrs. Ferguson had heard about the invitation to Meadowfield Lodge, and how anxious Mrs. Haythorne had been to make

Phil's acquaintance. And Miss Burnaby, too, was taking him up wonderfully. Not that that sort of thing would put bread and cheese into his mouth, or money into his pocket, but still it might set him up a little and make him think that people who had to stir about for their own living were not good enough for him. He was quite welcome to think so if he liked, so far as she was concerned, for there was nothing she looked down upon so much as a young man who had no means of his own and yet tried to thrust himself into the society of his betters. Mrs. Ferguson was rather sore about Phil's not going to board with her, even if he had not taken up with Harriet Brown and the old thatched cottage. But that last proceeding showed him to have such very poor prospects that really, except for old acquaintance sake, one need not trouble oneself much about him.

Still one would be kind to the young man. And so Mrs. Ferguson, flinging open the door of her house with as much energy as she used in flinging back the strings of her cap, said,

“Pray walk in, Phil, I am sure we are very glad to see you. Better late than never. I shouldn’t have thought at one time that you would have let a whole week pass without coming in to see us. You are just in time for tea. We have it at six now, with a little something solid, and then there is no need for a sit down supper afterwards.”

Now nothing was farther from Phil’s thoughts than to call upon Mrs. Ferguson just then, to say nothing of going in to tea, “with a little something solid.” But under the circumstances he could scarcely help himself, and, almost before he knew where he was, he found himself in the newly curtained drawing-room, Mrs. Ferguson

having preceded him thither with much complacency.

“We had it newly done up for Frances Ann’s wedding,” said that good lady. “I thought as the family was getting out of my hands, and I was likely to remain in the house with Cousin Tholthorpe, I might as well make things look comfortable once for all. Take a seat here by the window, Phil, and I’ll tell Audrey you’re come. I don’t doubt but that she’ll leave her drawing and come down, though in a general way it isn’t much we see of her after she comes back from Mrs. Haythorne’s. But she was home earlier than usual this afternoon, or else she often has a cup of tea before she comes.” A fact which Mrs. Ferguson stated with some emphasis, for two reasons. First, that Phil might know how comfortably intimate Audrey was with Mrs. Haythorne, though both the Major and his wife were people who

were called upon by the best society in the place. And secondly, that he might take to heart this truth, namely, that if Audrey had been particularly wishful to have spent an hour in his own company, she might easily have done so by staying for a cup of tea, as usual, at Meadowfield Lodge.

And then Mrs. Ferguson bustled away, not so much to call Audrey down, as to hurry Abigail, the maid of all work, into a clean white apron, and get the common tea-things swept off the dining-room table, and the new white-and-gold set which had been bought for Frances Ann's wedding, spread out in their place.

"And the cold ham, Abigail," she said in accents which penetrated to the drawing-room, "and be sure you don't take the wrong milk. That set to the right hand as you go in at the dairy door is to cream for tea."

Phil heard, and wished himself in the

long white-washed chamber above Harriet Brown's kitchen. There at least things were what they seemed to be, and no attempt was made to better them. And the bit of Dutch-carpet, and the white-washed walls, with the dark beams of oak across them, and the ceiling, and the scent of honeysuckle blowing in through the open casement, were more to his taste than the stuffy bright green gentility of Mrs. Ferguson's newly-furnished drawing-room, and the ringing accents of Mrs. Ferguson's housekeeperly voice in the regions below.

Phil walked up and down in an impatient frame of mind. Apparently Miss Audrey was not in a hurry to come to him. Or perhaps she was changing her dress, or "doing up" her hair. But then again, as Mrs. Ferguson had gone straight away to the kitchen, probably Audrey did not so

much as know that he was in the house. And then he looked round.

How different from the cosy little drawing-room he had just left ! The violent green curtains made his eyes ache. The muslin shades within them, with a pattern of long tailed peacocks up and down the border, were of such stiff and snowy whiteness that a breath of air through open windows must not be allowed to blow upon them ; and so there was a stagnant closeness about the room which completed what the violent green curtains had begun. Then such a chilly polish upon the white paper, such impossible flowers upon the brilliant carpet, such equally impossible ones of paper and wax and calico under glass shades upon the marble chimney-piece, such marvellous crochet antimaccassars, covering still more impossible lilies and roses in “woolwork” underneath. How chill and

dreary and would-be fine it all looked ! Could not Audrey manage things a little better ? Or did she spend all her spare time in drawing, and take no thought at all for how things looked in her own home ? How curious it was that some people left their own impress on everything around them ! Now if you could have turned Mrs. Haythorne into that room, Phil said to himself, she would have made a difference in it at once. In the first place, she would have opened the windows, and pushed back those long-tailed muslin peacocks, and dragged the chairs out of line, and disarranged the long straight row of glass vases on the mantelpiece, and introduced a sort of artistic disorder into the room, even if she could not have altered the glaring discords in its colouring. And she would have put trailing garlands of real leaves, flags and reed grasses from the moat side

and bits of blackberry spray, in place of those wax and paper and calico abominations, so that at any rate there should be something pleasant to rest one's eyes upon. Surely Audrey might have done that, if she could have done nothing else.

Probably it never entered Phil's mind that Mrs. Ferguson was a woman who disliked "leaves and that sort of litter" anywhere, but especially in her drawing-room. Indeed Mrs. Ferguson liked nothing in the way of ornaments which could not be dusted, along with the vases and glass-shades, every morning; and that was why she had swept out Audrey's arrangements in flag leaves and blossoming grasses, especially as the grasses were scattered about on the tablecloth, and made "such work as never was." Now when you had a group of wax flowers under a glass shade, there it was, and you could keep it clean, and there was an end of

it; besides, it gave the room a genteel appearance, for anybody could have leaves and that sort of rubbish, even Mrs. Frogston herself, in her twopenny halfpenny lodgings opposite.

But whilst Phil was thinking his own thoughts in this way, Audrey came.

## CHAPTER XI.

AND came looking rather cold and constrained. Indeed she was almost as cold as the paper-hangings, and, to use Mrs. Ferguson's favourite expression, one could not say more than that.

Poor girl! It was not her fault. For the very day that Phil's letter had come, declining the offer of board and residence upon reasonable terms at the Moat House, Mrs. Ferguson, thinking that it indicated tolerably conclusively the state of Mr. Hathaway's mind with reference to the proposal which he had made three years

before, had called her eldest daughter into the spare bed-room, and locking the door, to give the interview an air of greater importance, had informed her, both of that proposal, and of the manner in which it had been received.

“For your papa and I thought, Audrey, it was the best thing we could do for your advantage, Mr. Hathaway being situated as he was then, with no prospects, and everything undetermined as to how he would be likely to get on. At the same time, we told him that if he should be in the same mind when he came back, and if he had a prospect of getting on satisfactorily, there would be no objection in either of our minds.”

Audrey said nothing, it was all too strange and sudden. To think that three years ago Phil had loved her enough to ask that she might one day be his wife !

Mrs. Ferguson continued, in a somewhat severe and injured manner,

“I leave the rest with you to judge, Audrey. If you think that Mr. Hathaway’s behaviour, since he came back to Dimplethorpe, has been the behaviour of a man who wished for anything more than friendship at this house, I have nothing more to say. I can’t say that I see anything of the sort in it, and he not even accepting my offer to make a home for him in the house. But, Audrey, I wouldn’t on any account have you otherwise than friendly with him. I should be very sorry if you made the least difference in your behaviour. Your poor dear papa always thought a great deal about him ; not that I could approve it myself, though I never opposed him in it ; but at the same time, out of respect to your papa, I should always wish Mr. Hathaway to feel that he can come to the house as usual, if he likes. And

therefore you will please me best by behaving to him just as if nothing had happened."

"Very well, Mamma," said Audrey, vaguely, seeing that Mrs. Ferguson expected her to say something.

"I should never wish to influence any of my family, Audrey, in such a matter. I think it is every girl's duty to judge for herself, when she is of an age to do it, which you were not at the time I mention. However it does not seem to me that Mr. Hathaway is troubling himself about it. That is *my* opinion."

By which Mrs. Ferguson meant to intimate that Audrey had very much better make up her mind to Mr. Barraclough, who, since Frances Ann's wedding, had been coming forward in a manner which left very little doubt as to his ultimate intentions. Mr. Barraclough was everything, both in position and prospects and character, that a girl could

desire ; and it was tolerably certain that he would come in for the stewardship when Mr. Norsborough, whose head-clerk he now was, gave up work. In that case Audrey would do better for herself, as the phrase goes, than either Frances Ann had done, or Rose Emma was likely to do.

Of course this conversation had been much in Audrey's mind. It took place the morning after she had dined with Phil Hathaway at the Manor House. She had scrupulously avoided him since then. It was to keep out of his way that she had come home that afternoon, instead of staying, as Mrs. Haythorne wished her, at Meadowfield Lodge. Because she felt that now she could not meet him as if nothing had happened. That would have been a hard enough task for any girl with much shyness or pride in her nature, even if her heart had never been touched at all ; but for

Audrey, whose feelings must be either entirely told or entirely hidden, it was simply an impossibility.

Of course if she had been a flirt, things would have been much more comfortable for her. She would then have had at any rate a pleasant sense of power over this man who, three years ago, had thought so much about her as to wish to make her his wife. And if she had possessed the fine self-confidence which generally forms part of the flirt's character, it would have been no difficult matter to assume that he was now coming forward with the same intentions. And such an assumption would have given an air of ease and freedom to her manner, and nothing would have been lost by that foolish constraint which never knows how to make the best of circumstances.

But, unfortunately for her present comfort, Audrey, instead of being a flirt,

was a girl of fine, keen, sensitive nature, who would scarcely give a thought to the admiration or preference of any man, save the one whom she loved. Compared with that one, all others would be to her as though they were not ; and in the presence of that one, she must either be all herself, or stand quietly apart as a stranger.

That walk home from the Manor House had considerably ruffled the current of Audrey's life. It had turned her thoughts back upon the past. Phil's influence was no new thing. What he had said to her that night had only awakened in her heart something which had been resting quietly there ever since the old days when they used to spend those long afternoons together by the Moat side. She had learned in that walk home what he had meant her to learn, that he wanted something more than friendship from her. And in the days

which had passed since, she had also learned that she could give what he wanted.

Very foolish! And when the young man had said nothing definite about what he wanted or did not want. But it is just the foolishness which is native to the noblest hearts, and will be so long as their nobleness remains.

Now a new and disturbing influence had been added. Audrey could have kept her thoughts to herself, and if Phil Hathaway, having said so much, had said no more, she could have gone on her way quietly, giving neither him nor anyone else leave to see what he had done. But the thing had somehow passed out of her keeping now. Three years ago the boy-friend, whom in her girlish way she had set up as an idol in her heart, had so remembered her as to ask her for his wife. And he had been bidden away, with the somewhat cold comfort that, if in

three more years he was still of the same mind, there might not perhaps be so much objection to it.

And now he had come back. And the joy which that coming back had brought, Audrey scarcely dared own to herself, when as yet she knew nothing of what had gone before it.

But now that she did know, all was changed. That Philip Hathaway had come back, did not at all imply that he had come in the same mind. Audrey, with the self-depreciation of all really fine natures, rather took it for granted that he had not. To her the love of the man to whom she had, even in thought, given her own, seemed a happiness so great, the man himself so far above her, that, looking at her own little deservings, she asked why she should be worthy of it, and what there was in her to draw so great a blessing down. She was

not of the sunny-hearted ones who take happiness for granted, to whom it comes as their birthright.

Phil had been three years away. In that time he had seen many new faces, lovelier than those he had left behind. He had grown in every way, by thought, by work, by companionship, by aspiration. She had gone through no such growth. Circumstances, she supposed, had rather narrowed her life than broadened it. She was where she had always been. He was far ahead of those old days now. Their memory could only be that of an outworn influence. How could he then be of the same mind still?

So Audrey reasoned to herself. It might have been better for her if she had not had quite so much reasoning power ; or if, having it, it had worked under the guidance of self-esteem instead of self-depreciation.

However, there was Phil in the drawing-

room, and she must go down to receive him. And more than that, she must behave to him just as if nothing had happened. Audrey tried to do so, and the result was a stiffness and constraint which, under the circumstances, was anything but favourable to that little plant of love whose growth Phil was cherishing with not quite so much watchfulness just now.

“I didn’t mean to come, Audrey,” he said, as she shook hands with him in a grave quiet way. Not shy, he could have borne that better, but so apparently self-possessed. “I really didn’t mean to come, for I wanted to get home and look over my pictures. But I happened to knock up against Mrs. Ferguson just as I was passing your door, and she took it for granted that I was coming in. And so you know I was obliged to come. I couldn’t help myself, could I?”

A promising beginning, most assuredly!

If Audrey's bad habit of always thinking the worst of herself had left room for even the faintest little bud of confidence, Phil's words would have nipped it off.

"I am very sorry, Phil," she began.

She thought it better to concede the "Phil." It looked more like brotherliness. She had called him "Phil" that first evening, down by the Moat side, and, if she dropped it now, he would most likely want to know the reason why, get into personalities, perhaps, than which nothing could be more embarrassing.

"I am very sorry, Phil. Shall I tell Mamma it was a mistake, and then I am sure she will not want you to stay."

"Well, no, you needn't give yourself quite so much trouble as that. I didn't say that it was a worry to me to come, and I didn't mean it, either, only I don't like people to give me credit for good intentions when I

haven't really got them, or any intentions at all, for that matter."

That, too, was an unfortunate speech, though Phil had meant it innocently enough. Audrey's quick pride, continually on the alert now, took it in just the wrong way. Remembering what her mother had told her such a little time before, and her parting words—"I leave it to your own sense to judge what he means"—she jumped, with feminine want of logic, to the conclusion that Phil was thinking of certain other intentions, which he had once expressed. And this was his way of intimating that if she knew of those intentions, and wished to be sure whether or not he was cherishing them still, she might take his words as an assurance that he had finally abandoned them.

And the suspicion that he was thus reading her thoughts, and thus giving her to under-

stand, without any definite word on the subject, that his mind was changed, stung her to the quick.

“Never mind,” she said, carelessly. “It is of no consequence whether you had any intentions or not. We will take it for granted that you had none, and then it will be all right.”

There; that would settle the matter, surely. If Master Phil had meant to make her understand, she would let him see that she had done so.

“And now shall you stay?” she asked, half disdainfully. “For if you will, I must go down and tell them to put an extra spoonful of tea into the pot.”

“Oh! no, pray don’t give yourself that trouble. I have had tea already. Mrs. Haythorne would not let us go away until we had some, almost the best I have ever tasted.”

"Then I am sure you had better not taste ours, for it is not a bit like Mrs. Haythorne's. I know what hers is very well, for she gives me some nearly every afternoon."

"Then why didn't you stay this afternoon?"

Audrey coloured.

"I came home to please myself. I suppose that is enough. And I knew Mrs. Haythorne would not be lonely. I always stay with her when there is no one else."

"Yes, and Mrs. Haythorne was saying how pleasant it is for her to have you as a companion."

"It was very good of her."

"Yes, and I should think it is very pleasant for you too, to have *her* as a companion. There is nothing which seems to educate a girl like being with a really cultivated woman."

"Thank you," said Audrey, coolly. "I do

need that sort of education very much. And nobody knows it better than myself."

"And she dresses so beautifully too," added Phil. "Why, it is like looking at a picture to watch her."

That was another thrust. At least Audrey took it as such. That brown merino of hers, which she had put on when she came home, had no rich lights and shades about it, no sweet reminder of buds and flowers where the sunlight fell upon it. It had not even the tone necessary for bringing out what colour there was in her complexion, and the best thing Audrey could have done would have been never to have put it on. But Cousin Tholthorpe had given it to her for a birthdaypresent, and Cousin Tholthorpe had great faith in brown, both as an antidote to vanity, and a good colour for wearing; and so there was the merino, and poor Audrey must wear it until she could afford to buy something

which suited her better. And besides, being in the frame of mind before intimated, and being very anxious to let Phil see that, whatever else she might wish to do, she certainly did not wish to make an impression upon him, she had come down stairs without even putting on a bit of pale blue ribbon, as a set-off against the exceedingly puritanical character of her toilette. At the same time, Phil need not have taken quite so much trouble to make her feel her deficiencies.

Poor Audrey! The mirror of her soul was set this afternoon at such an angle that it could only reflect the cold lights which fell upon it. If Phil had said exactly the same things to her as they were walking home from Miss Burnaby's house that night, she would not have taken them half so much to heart. She would even have faced round upon him with a little of that sauciness

which he loved so well, because he knew he could bring her back from it at any time to the gentle submissiveness which he loved still better. But now he could bring her back to nothing at all. She seemed to be holding herself entirely apart from him.

To make matters worse, as they were talking together in this exceedingly unsatisfactory way, Mrs. Ferguson bustled upstairs into the drawing-room, with Mr. Barraclough under her wing.

"Audrey, here's Mr. Barraclough. He says he came on purpose to spend the evening with us. I'm sure it's very kind of him."

"Then I'll go," said Phil, readily enough.

And quite as readily Audrey let him do so, Mrs. Ferguson making not the least objection. Indeed she did not even say that they should be glad to see him another time.

## CHAPTER XII.

PHIL went home in a discontented frame of mind, chiefly because, in watching Mr. Barraclough shake hands with Audrey, he thought he detected a sort of impressiveness, which, if it did not indicate an actual understanding between them, indicated something which would very soon lead to it. Mrs. Ferguson, too, looked so exceedingly complacent and satisfied. Evidently Mr. Barraclough was in her good graces. The very tone of her voice, and the expression of her sharp beady eyes, and the energetic quiver of her cap streamers, said as plainly

as could be that she had found the man she could wish for a son-in-law.

And Phil seemed to himself to have a right of ownership in Audrey ; that is, if he chose to assert it. And he found himself ready to resent, as an act of unfaithfulness on her part, the welcome she had accorded to this man, and still more the readiness with which she had allowed her first guest to depart.

For, as he said to himself, even if she did not know what had been his feelings towards her three years ago, she certainly might have guessed a little from what he had said to her as they walked home from the Manor House. And Miss Audrey had not so many advantages of birth and position, and fortune and education, as to justify her in taking up that cool "nobody asked you, Sir, she said," sort of manner. It seemed to intimate that, after all, he was not doing

her such a very great favour in allowing her to suppose that he was thinking about her. It was so different from the gentleness she had shown before. Now Phil liked a touch of independence in the woman he had chosen for his wife, but he liked it in moderation. It was like the pepper in a tomato salad, very pleasant so long as it did not assert too much control over the tomato; because, after all, the tomato was the principal thing. He was half disposed to let Miss Audrey alone until she had learned how to mix her ingredients in due proportion.

So he made no attempt to meet her during the two or three days which elapsed before the time came for him to go to Meadowfield Lodge again. He had seen her once or twice walking with little Victor, but she seemed quite as willing to avoid him as he was to avoid her, even turning

down lanes or getting over stiles which he was quite sure were not in the original programme of the walk. Once only he got near enough to her to see her face, and then he felt a sort of pang, for it looked pale and weary. It was evidently an effort to her to keep on talking to little Victor, who, with the fierce despotism of childhood, had no idea of letting his spell of out-door enjoyment be marred by want of sympathy on the part of his companion.

“Miss Ferguson, why don’t you laugh to me? You have not laughed to me all the time. You are no use a bit. If you don’t tell me nice stories I shall ask Mamma to let me have Mathilde back again. I could always make Mathilde do as I liked.”

That was what Phil heard as Audrey toiled along over the osier flats one hot July afternoon, as he was down amongst a clump of willows, sketching the Warrenshire

Hills. It gave him a touch of sadness, because he thought he knew whose fault it was; but after all he was more glad than sorry. It was rather pleasant to be able to make Audrey suffer just a little, in return for the annoyance which her coldness had cost him. And then some day before long he would set it all straight.

It was with these thoughts in his mind, and a few of his best sketches in a portfolio under his arm, that Phil set off to Meadowfield Lodge on the appointed afternoon.

What a welcome the very house seemed to give him as soon as he entered it, so different from the green damask and peacock muslin chilliness of Mrs. Ferguson's mathematically correct drawing-room. Everything around Mrs. Haythorne seemed to exist for the comfort of herself and her guests. There was an air of such artistic disarrangement about the place. One was

continually coming upon such pleasant little surprises of bookshelves, or curtained recesses, or half finished sketches lying amongst heaps of Indian embroidery, or lovely bits of fancy work with the needle stuck in them, and the tiniest of golden thimbles stuffed amongst the skeins of silk. Every corner of the room was lived in ; there was not a hint of anything simply for show. And Mrs. Haythorne herself, this time in some curious coloured sort of Chinese silk, with a cluster of faded leaves here and there upon it, and a collar of rough amber beads round her throat,—how exactly she appeared in harmony with everything around her !

“It was so good of you to come,” she said, rising from her easel and trailing long dead-golden draperies after her as she came to shake hands with him. “I was half afraid you might forget, and that would have been *such* a disappointment.”

If Audrey had met him half as pleasantly, Phil thought. But then Phil forgot that he had told Audrey that he had not meant to come and see her at all. Of course that made a difference. He told Mrs. Haythorne now that he was not likely to forget anything to which he had been looking forward with so much pleasure.

“I am sure it is very good of you, Mr. Hathaway, to say so. And I have so little to offer in the way of entertainment. However”—and there was a half sarcastic ring in her voice—“I daresay you know the French proverb, ‘When one has not what one likes, one must like what one has!’ There is a mine of wisdom in that saying, is there not?”

“I don’t know,” said Phil, simply. “I never heard it before. I think I am generally in the happy position of being able to like what I have.”

“You are a fortunate man. I hope you will never escape from that position. And yet I don’t know. Perhaps there is nothing more hopeless for us than always being able to like what we have. We should never strive to get beyond it, in that case.”

“Well, there is just a difference between liking what we have and liking what we are. It certainly would be a bad look-out if we were always contented with *ourselves*.”

“Do you think so? Now it is my opinion that, if we are not satisfied with ourselves, we shall never find anything else to be satisfied with. But come and look at my picture. I hate talking metaphysics. My chat with you the other afternoon reminded me of a little picture I used to enjoy so much in one of the Paris galleries, one of the yearly exhibitions, you know, of modern

paintings. We were in Paris a month on our way home, and I believe I used to go and look at that little thing nearly every day. Strange that I never asked the artist's name, but I did not. It was quite enough to enjoy his work. I daresay you don't know it, but to my mind it is one of the sweetest things I ever saw."

"I do happen to know it," said Phil, quietly, coming forward to look at a half-finished copy of one of his own pictures. It was a sketch of the gable end of old Ben Hathaway's cottage, with a bit of Dimplethorpe church tower and the rookery beyond. The rest, as Mrs. Haythorne had left it, was not filled in at all.

"I had made several sketches of it," he said, "before I went abroad, and then I finished one and sent it to that last Paris exhibition. How curious that you should have taken a fancy to it!"

"I don't know *that*," said the lady, half saucily, "unless you give me credit for possessing no taste at all, and no one has ever been so rude as to do that. I cannot think how anyone could go past that picture and not be attracted by it. There is something so restful and peaceful about it. You see I have only just been able to put in a bit here and there, from memory. There ought to have been some water in the foreground, I know, and flag leaves and things, and I fancy just here there was a pretty figure of a young girl beside a pollard willow."

And Mrs. Haythorne, with one jewelled finger, indicated the spot, where, in the original of the picture, Phil had put Audrey, with her loose hair tumbling down, as she used to wear it in her girlish days.

"And you mean to say that you paint-

ed it. How strange ! If you could but know how much that little picture used to be to me ! I went to look at it whenever I felt restless and out of love with everything, and it used to quiet me, if it did not always make me content. I did so often wish I could thank the artist who painted it, and now I can."

And Mrs. Haythorne turned upon him a look from those great brown eyes, which made Phil, he knew not why, full of pity for some unexpressed sorrow which must be vexing her life.

"But tell me," she said, "where it is, and all about it."

"It is a little sketch from the Moat here, halfway between the church and the Castle. I used to spend many happy hours there when I was a boy, and so I wanted to be able to remember it."

"Indeed yes." And there was again a

change in Mrs. Haythorne's voice. "There is nothing like remembering what we used to have in the old times. And it is really a place here, in this stupid old village? One may live in the midst of beauty and not know it, if it has never been mixed up with one's own life. I must finish that sketch now, you will tell me how to do it."

And Mrs. Haythorne took up the palette and brushes. "Here, I know, was the water, and about here were the flag flowers. If I could but remember all the rest."

"Let *me*."

Phil took the brush out of her hands and began to sketch in the remaining part of the picture, Mrs. Haythorne standing beside him, watching intently. He was still busy when Audrey, having finished Victor's lessons, came in.

"Miss Burnaby has just been to say that she is very sorry she cannot come over for

tea this afternoon. I think somebody has come from London, or something. She said she would come another day, instead."

"Oh, yes! that will do just as well. It is of no consequence. Mr. Hathaway is showing me how to finish this picture. Only fancy, Miss Ferguson, is it not curious? It is the picture I was telling you about, which I used to enjoy so much in Paris, and you said you were sure, from my description, it must be like a bit of Dimplethorpe. Well, it really *is*, and Mr. Hathaway painted it himself. It is the old Castle and Moat. Come and look."

Audrey came. It was the very picture which Phil had been working at when they said good-bye to each other, down by the Moat side, seven years ago. At least it was probably not the same picture, but it was taken from the same spot.

"And you know," Mrs. Haythorne con-

tinued, "Mr. Hathaway says he has pleasant associations with the place, and I suppose that is the reason he has been able to represent it so faithfully. I am sure he cannot have pleasanter than mine. I cannot tell him what good that quiet, peaceful little bit of scenery has often done me."

Audrey could understand how, once upon a time, Phil might have had pleasant associations connected with the old Moat and the flag leaves and the pollard willow leaning over towards the water's edge ; but, as he had evidently changed his mind since then, there was no need for her to express any great admiration for the beauty of the subject.

There was no need for her to help in the conversation, either. Phil and Mrs. Haythorne were quite able to carry that on by themselves. So she sat down in the open bay-window, half amongst the verandah

creepers, and busied herself with a piece of embroidery, Phil just glancing at her now and then as he worked away at the picture on the easel.

She did not seem to him in harmony with her surroundings. There was something too cold and simple about her. If she had been sitting in that grassy hollow by the Moat side, with that grey dress on and that bit of wild rose fastened in with the ribbon round her throat, she would have looked all right. But the subdued gorgeousness of the tints and ornaments and draperies which Mrs. Haythorne, as if by instinct, gathered round her, asked for something more vivid in its colouring, something with more of oriental glow and glory about it. Still, in her own place, she was very sweet and very pretty, though compared with her companion she only showed—

“As moonlight unto sunlight,  
Or water unto wine.”

At that moment Mr. Langton, the curate, was announced.

“*What* a nuisance!” said Mrs. Haythorne in an under-tone, starting back from Phil’s elbow.

And Phil thought so, too.

## CHAPTER XIII.

PHIL'S presence in Dimplethorpe was as yet unknown, both to the vicar and his curate, he not having presented himself in church, and so claimed recognition from his spiritual pastors and masters. And Miss Ferguson, being daughter of the late dissenting minister, and sister-in-law of the present one, could still less be looked upon in the light of a parishioner to whom any special attention was due. Accordingly Mr. Langton, after courteously acknowledging the ceremony of introduction, devoted himself almost entirely to Mrs. Haythorne,

rather to the annoyance of that lady, who would much have preferred turning him over to Audrey and continuing her conversation with the young artist.

But the Major's gifted wife, whatever else she might fail in, never did fail in making herself charming to any gentleman who did himself the pleasure of calling upon her. And so pleasantly she smiled upon Mr. Langton, and so interested she seemed in what he had to say, that when, after the lapse of a quarter of an hour, he took his departure, it was with the firm conviction that he had not only produced a favourable impression on Mrs. Haythorne, but that she herself was one of the most delightful women he had ever met. There was something so charming and unaffected about her, and she had such exquisite tact in making people feel at their ease with her; besides being so lovely, that even to look upon her

was a privilege. She was really quite an acquisition to the somewhat limited, though very well-bred society of upper-class Dimplethorpe.

But Mrs. Haythorne, chatting away so gaily and pleasantly with her clerical caller, was yet keeping both eyes and ears open to what was going on between the young couple, who were having things rather too much their own way in that curtained bay-window. For of course Phil could not go on with his painting; and, knowing Audrey even slightly, he could scarcely have done otherwise than join her as she sat there alone with her embroidery. Mrs. Haythorne would have drawn Audrey into the conversation at her end of the room, but Mr. Langton, who of course did not know what was going on in her mind, did not feel it his duty to second her attempts, Miss Ferguson being, in common with the rest of the chapel people,

under a sort of mild excommunication as regarded Church of England privileges ; and as Audrey herself was always shy and quiet with strangers, and moreover did not feel herself exactly on the footing of a guest in the house, she did not respond vigorously either ; and so matters remained as they were, Phil leaning against one of the mullions of the bay-window, and playing with a bit of cluster-rose which the wind blew now against Audrey's waves of light brown hair, and now against his own fingers.

There was a look in Audrey's face to-day which gave him a touch of pain, even whilst, as before, he was glad to think that he had so much power over her. He had been a little unkind of set purpose lately, but he had not intended really to wound her. Perhaps she had taken his behaviour a little too much to heart. After all, it was not her fault that the Moat House drawing-room was so

vulgarly genteel, and that Mrs. Ferguson was so busy and bustling, and that Rose Emma had a round red face and a button nose, and such an air of pink ribbonness about her. She was doing the best she could, under circumstances of peculiar difficulty. He would try to make up for a little unkindness during the past few days, by being attentive now.

“Do you remember that picture, Audrey?”

“Yes, I do.”

Mrs. Haythorne, talking to the curate about the stained glass in the parish church, heard that question, and the reply. And she heard, too, that they revealed a story. These young people had a past in common. They had interests and associations which she could not share. And just so far as she was interested in Phil, and she really was that now, and wished him to be interested in her—which was her attitude towards all clever

men—she was vexed that another should be able to share what had not been given to herself.

Now Phil was playing with the cluster-rose. Now it was kissing Audrey's cheek. Now Phil was playing with it again.

She remembered, listening all the while to Mr. Langton's criticisms on thirteenth-century stained glass, that Miss Burnaby had once said something to her about Miss Ferguson's father having been very kind to young Hathaway, having had him at the house a great deal, to give him lessons. A boy-and-girl friendship perhaps, and he felt himself indebted to the family. But he need not be so marked in his attentions.

“Oh! *exquisite*, Mr. Langton. I have always delighted in early English architecture. I think that window in the little chantry is perfect, so much more beautiful

than the perpendicular in the nave and transept. And then——”

Here Mrs. Haythorne caught the word “Audrey” from the other end of the room. Had it come to that, then, or were they really like brother and sister? But she had never heard Miss Ferguson speak of Mr. Hathaway as Philip. It was only Miss Burnaby who did that.

Then she lost the thread of the conversation, both threads in fact, being so much absorbed in wondering what that “Audrey” could mean, that she was obliged to ask Mr. Langton to repeat his last remark about the quarries in the next window. Shortly afterwards, to her great relief, he took his departure.

“*Now*, Mr. Hathaway,” she said, with charming vivacity, “I am out of prison. Do let us begin again. I really thought

that curate would never go away. How tiresome it is when people cannot see that they are interrupting! Miss Ferguson, dear,"—and she turned to Audrey—"that embroidery of yours reminds me. Will you just go into the morning-room and look for a little more of that blue silk for my convolvulus spray. I think it is in the work-table in the window, but I am not sure. It *may* be upstairs in my dressing-room."

"Never mind," said Audrey, leaving the room, "I will look until I find it."

"I am so sorry to give you the trouble, but, when Mr. Hathaway is painting, I do not feel as if I liked to cease watching him for a single moment."

Which was true, under other circumstances than the painting.

"I did not know you and Miss Ferguson

were such old friends," she remarked tentatively, as Audrey's light step was heard in the hall.

Phil coloured, partly with embarrassment, and partly with pleasure that Mrs. Haythorne should interest herself enough about him to know who were his friends and who were not.

"Oh! yes. Mr. Ferguson was very kind to me. He taught me all that I knew of painting before I went to London. If it had not been for him, I might have been basket-making now."

"No, you would never have been doing *that*, Mr. Hathaway. You would have made your own way. Genius always does."

"Not unless the way is opened first."

"Oh yes, it does. Of course it was very pleasant for Mr. Ferguson and the dear old General to think that they had done everything for you, but in reality it is you who

have done everything for yourself. You have that in you which *could* not have gone on basket-making. But still it is very nice to be grateful."

There was a pause. Phil painted on.

"I have no patience with people thinking you would never have done anything if they had not helped you. It is such a cheap way of raising oneself. How beautifully that bit of the Moat is coming out! What would I not give if I could make a thing grow under my hands like that? Oh! Mr. Hathaway."

"Yes."

"A thought has just come into my mind."

"Will you tell it to me?"

"May I?"

"Certainly."

"You will promise not to be offended."

"I think I may safely do that."

"Well, you know, sometimes at first,

when young artists have not a great deal to do, I mean, you know, before their pictures get very well known, they do not much object to giving lessons. And I wondered if I might ask you to——”

Phil jumped to the conclusion that she wanted him to give lessons to Audrey. As she was so fond of the young girl, and so anxious to help her in every way, it might not be unlikely. And he would be glad too, for, as Mrs. Haythorne had suggested, he had indeed little enough to do.

“I should not have the least objection,” he said, carelessly. “Indeed I had thought of it myself sometimes.”

“Oh! then you will not be offended with me. I am so glad. What I want to know is whether you will give *me* lessons. It would be such a boon to me. Only if you dislike it in the least, do not hesitate to say so.”

Something told Mrs. Haythorne that probably Phil would not dislike it in the least, and she was quite prepared for his reply.

“I shall be very glad indeed to give you lessons. I will paint before you, and leave you my work to copy. That will be the best way.”

“Oh! thank you, Mr. Hathaway. That is so good of you. Then we may consider it as settled.”

“Certainly.”

“You must let me know when you can come, and I will always be ready. I could not think, you know, of tying you down to one particular day, for you might be just in the spirit of some special picture at home, and it would spoil everything if you had to go away and leave it. You must send me word when you feel in the

mood for coming, and I will make my time suit yours."

"Thank you. I will do so."

Then there was another pause. Mrs. Haythorne broke it.

"What a pity Miss Ferguson belongs to that sort of people. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know," said Phil, rather proudly. "If one was responsible for the sort of people one belonged to, I should be rather badly off myself."

"Oh! I did not mean *that*," said Mrs. Haythorne, colouring a little, and looking earnestly into Phil's face. "I am so sorry to have said it, if you take it in that way. Pray forgive me. You know it is part of true greatness to be independent of such things."

"I suppose it is."

"Yes, only for a woman it is different. Common-place surroundings are more fatal

to her than they can ever be to a man. You know a woman takes on influences and is moulded by them so much more readily."

"Miss Ferguson is certainly unfortunate in her family connections," said Phil, with just a touch of stiffness in his manner still, "but you are doing the best you can to help her. It is a wonderful advantage for her to come to you. I feel it will be the same for myself."

"Oh! Mr. Hathaway, you must not say that. I could not think for a moment that the advantage would be other than on my side, if you would be good enough to come. But with Miss Ferguson it is different. Girls *are* so much more dependent upon their surroundings; and such a nest of them as I suppose there is at that house."

Audrey came quietly back into the room. She could scarcely have avoided hearing

the last few words of that sentence. With no change in her voice or look, Mrs. Haythorne continued—

“I am sure the way some of the poor people are packed together in this place is disgraceful. I went down one of those little lanes near the church yesterday, and I was positively frightened, the children came out in such swarms. Oh! thank you, Miss Ferguson. I am afraid you have had a great deal of trouble.”

“No. I had to go upstairs for it, and that made me so long.”

“Of course. I remembered afterwards that I *had* left it in my dressing-room. It was so stupid of me not to have thought before you went out. But what do you think? Mr. Hathaway is good enough to say he will give me lessons in painting. I hope he will generally come whilst you are busy with Victor, because when I can have

you afterwards, I am not so lonely."

"Do you think, Mr. Hathaway," she continued, turning to him as, with such apparent carelessness, she gave this little hint as to the time at which she should like the lessons to be given—"Do you think we could begin by making a little sketch of this corner of the house, with that big old elm-tree? I was so thankful they left that tree standing. The house is rather pretty, is it not, though it is so new? You see the climbing plants have done wonderfully well. The soil suits them exactly."

"I thought it looked very pretty the first time I saw it," said Phil.

"Oh! When you came over with Miss Burnaby and had tea? I could see at once that you were an artist by the way you looked at things."

"No. I had seen it before that."

"When?"

“The night before. I came down here in the moonlight. It was after I had seen you home, Audrey—Miss Ferguson, from the Manor House.”

Audrey blushed. It was the first time Phil had corrected himself in calling her by her name. A curious look flitted over Mrs. Haythorne's face. There was a sharp light in her eyes.

“Indeed!” she said, rather coldly. “I did not know you had seen it before. But I am glad you like it.”

Very soon after that, Phil went away.

## CHAPTER XIV.

AUDREY took her departure, too, as soon as Phil had had time for a good start on the road to old Ben Hathaway's cottage, and Mrs. Haythorne was left to think her own thoughts.

She remembered it all now, going back to the night Phil had named. For she and the Major had had, what indeed was not unusual with them, a slight misunderstanding, and she had gone out there into the garden to brood over her wrongs, and think how things might have been, if fate or fortune had not so cruelly crossed the lines of her life.

Most of the upper-class people of Dimplethorpe, who had called upon the Haythornes, had asked themselves the question which had been suggested to little Miss Burnaby's mind—

“Why on earth did she marry him?”

The question had been answered by different people in different ways, all however agreeing in admiration of the outward courtesy shown by a handsome and talented woman to a man who was so immeasurably her inferior.

All except Miss Burnaby. Miss Burnaby liked Mrs. Haythorne very much. They were on the best of possible terms with each other, but Jack's sister always remembered the cold, chilling look which came over Mrs. Haythorne's face whenever she had occasion to speak a word to her husband. Now the Major was an uninteresting man, but when you had said that you had said the

worst that could be said of him. He was an extremely good domestic character. He never crossed his wife, and he let her have as much money as she liked ; and Miss Burnaby thought that any woman who could say those three things of her husband, had a right to love, honour, and obey him a great deal better than, by all appearance, Mrs. Haythorne loved, honoured, and obeyed that handsome Major of hers.

But this was Mrs. Haythorne's story, if only the simple folk of Dimplethorpe could have found it out, which they never did.

Her father was an artist, and an unsuccessful one, too, who struggled to keep up a position for himself and his wife and their only child in a fashionable part of London. Mrs. Haythorne, or Delphine Murray as she was then, grew up a bright, handsome, clever girl, and in due time gave her heart to a young painter, poorer far than her father,

who used to spend his evenings sometimes at the house.

They were never formally engaged. It was only a thing taken for granted. And whilst things were in that stage, Major, then Captain Haythorne, came upon the scene. He was rich, handsome, well connected. He could afford to help Mr. Murray through some money difficulties which were pressing hard upon him just then. It was easy for Mrs. Murray, a scheming, ambitious woman, to bring up little misunderstandings between the young couple who loved each other, and to intercept a letter in which the artist-lover had sought to make matters straight again. The Captain came forward, was accepted, as many a man has been before, out of pique, Delphine telling him plainly that she loved some one else. The wedding was hurried on, Captain Haythorne's regiment being under orders for India. The week after their

marriage, Delphine learned about the letter which had been intercepted. Next week she sailed with her husband for India; within a twelvemonth she heard of the young artist's death, and so the first act of her life came to its end.

Still there was enough in an Indian career to amuse her. She did not care for her husband. She did not even try to do so. And therefore it was no difficult matter to persuade herself that the climate of the Indian plains was too trying for her, and that she must go for six months every year to the bracing atmosphere of the hills. Life there was a more amusing thing. There were plenty of idle men about, officers and civilians, only too ready to pay her those little attentions which a handsome woman naturally expects to receive, and which can be accepted in Indian hill society without quite so much remark on the part of out-

siders as they would call forth in the severer social atmosphere of England.

But, even in Mahableshwur, Mrs. Haythorne carried things a little too far, and, to avoid unpleasantness, the Major, who was a peaceable man, asked for two years' furlough.

Mrs. Haythorne did not object. Indeed it was rather a pleasant change for her, as the Major proposed spending a few months on the Continent before they took a house at home. She had only been amusing herself. She had no heart to be touched, either by her husband or anyone else. She had a love for painting, inherited from her father, and so long as she could gratify that, and have a few gentlemen to admire her, it was of very little consequence whether the field of action lay in India or England. Martin was dead, and all places were alike to her. Only she must be flattered, courted, paid attention to; and if her husband did not

satisfy her in these respects, then some one else must. Besides, she had told him plainly enough, from the beginning, that she did not care for him, so he knew what he had to expect.

It was a dreary story to have gone on telling itself for eight years. The Major did not care greatly. He had a well-dressed wife and well-dressed dinners, and he was well-dressed himself, and his soul—as much as he had of it—was satisfied within him. But those years had made his wife a bitter woman, and that bitterness found vent sometimes in scorn, outspoken scorn and contempt of the man who had been fool enough to marry her when she had no love to give him.

There had been an outburst of this kind that evening when Phil Hathaway and Audrey were dining at the Manor House. The Major, who always got the worst of the

battle on such occasions, intimated his intention of going down into Scotland on a shooting expedition, for the sake of peace and quietness. Mrs. Haythorne had told him it would be a great relief to her if he would go, and make the expedition last as long as he conveniently could ; and then she had betaken herself to the garden, to cool her indignation.

As she was pacing up and down, with a great white Indian shawl wrapped round her, she had seen a young man saunter past, and he had said to himself—she could hear it plainly enough in the stillness of the July moonlight—

“Never mind ! Queen Audrey is worth it all.”

It was Mr. Hathaway, then. She thought she had heard the voice before when he called next day with Miss Burnaby, but she could not remember where. Now it was

all clear, and this young girl staying in the house with her, this Miss Ferguson, was the "Queen Audrey" who was worth so much.

Mrs. Haythorne bit her lips, and there was anything but a soft light in her beautiful brown eyes as she looked at the picture which Phil had been painting.

This Mr. Hathaway was the only man she had seen yet in Dimplethorpe who could amuse or interest her at all. Mr. Bentham the Squire; he had no thoughts which reached beyond his race-horses. Mr. Langton; he knew about stained glass and architecture, and that was all he knew. Mr. Laxby; he was courteous and genial and gentlemanly, and did a great deal of good amongst the poor people; but she believed nothing that he believed, she had long ago grown past it all, and she only went to church because it was respectable to do so. The General; he was an innocent

old soul, whom anyone with a pretty face and a fine pair of eyes could make a fool of. Philip Hathaway alone could meet her on her own ground, could give back thought for thought, or strike with his intellect any flashes of light from hers.

And he was an artist too, and that brought back the old times, not so long ago, when she and Martin used to meet and have those pleasant walks, which deepened at last into the only love she could ever know.

Audrey came in, quiet, simple, composed. What a provoking calm there was about the girl! What untold depths of truth and goodness in her face! One did not always want to have one's moral consciousness vexed by such contrasts.

Mrs. Haythorne, standing at the easel, took up her brushes and appeared to be busy painting. Audrey took her work and sat in the window.

And Martin used to paint for her then, as Phil had been painting for her now. And he was to have been her husband, only a lie had spoiled it all. And since she had known of that lie, and known with it that life could be nothing to her any more but an acted charade, sometimes comic, sometimes tragic, but always false, she had seen none who could at all reach through the falseness and touch her real self, but this Mr. Hathaway, who, thinking out his own thoughts, and knowing not that anyone was listening to them, had said—

“Queen Audrey is worth it all.”

“Miss Ferguson,” she said, scarcely turning as she spoke, “I feel as if I could get on better with this picture if I were quite alone. Don’t you know sometimes how the feeling of anyone watching your work seems to make you unable to do anything? Would you mind just going and

playing a game of dominoes with little Victor?"

And Audrey went.

## CHAPTER XV.

THEN Mrs. Haythorne sat down by her picture, and began to sketch another, a very different one, in her own thoughts.

Some women out of whose lives the joy has been crushed, either by the inevitable force which none can fight against, or by the bitterer result of circumstances which seem to have been brought about by human treachery, are yet able to arise from the blow, and cover the scars it has left with the sweet flowers of good works, so healing themselves in the healing of those whose wound perchance has not been so sore as their own. And others, upon whom the

shadow of disappointment has fallen, sit down in it and spend their days in gloomy inactivity. And others, to whom inactivity is impossible, find a sort of relief in doing some covert mischief to those who seem to be as happy as once they hoped to be themselves.

It was Audrey upon whom this happy light was arising, if it had not already risen. And for her happiness she needed the one man in Dimplethorpe upon whom Mrs. Haythorne had fixed to give vividness and interest to her own life.

Not that Mrs. Haythorne was what the world calls a wicked or a faithless woman, nothing of the sort. She went to church once every two Sundays, and required that Victor should be taught his Catechism, in common with geography and the other branches of a sound English education. She was no wife to spoil her husband's

good name; no mother to make her child wish he had never said his prayers at her knee; no daughter to bow her parents' head with shame.

But she must have some one to keep her life from stagnating; some one to appreciate her. And that appreciation must be given to herself alone, else there was neither sweetness nor satisfaction in it. She found in Phil Hathaway, earnest, clever, just a little conceited, but still simple and quite unskilled in the customs of the world, exactly what she needed. He was inexperienced enough in social ways to submit to her judgment, to be content to form his opinions, on every subject but art, after the model of hers. On that one subject she could learn from him, and that made their companionship complete.

Why then must Miss Ferguson come in and spoil it all? Miss Ferguson, who was

free to choose where she liked, and who, if Phil found a better career for himself, could marry some comfortable, steady-going man in Dimplethorpe, and be happy after the fashion of ordinary girls. Besides, had she not heard something about a Mr. Barraclough who visited frequently at the house? Surely that was the name Mrs. Frogston had mentioned when they took her rooms for a day or two, before going into their own house. Gossiping old Mrs. Frogston, who seemed to spend all her time in watching her neighbours' doings. And certainly if anyone knew who went in and out of the Moat House, Mrs. Frogston ought, and she certainly had said that Mr. Barraclough was paying a great deal of attention to the eldest Miss Ferguson. It could not have been either of the others, because they were already engaged.

But whether it was Mr. Barraclough or not, it ought not to be Mr. Philip Hathaway.

There was no question at all about that. Audrey was not equal to him. He ought to wait years and years, until he had grown to full strength, and then marry a woman who could grace the proud position he would then have won for her. In the meantime, she herself would find that zest in his companionship which poor dull little Dimplethorpe could not otherwise supply. And in return for such companionship, he would learn from her that knowledge of the world and of society without which, when he was once fairly afloat in London, he might make so many humiliating mistakes.

It was very easy, when she had got as far as this, for Mrs. Haythorne to convince herself that she was actuated by nothing but regard for Phil's interests. Miss Ferguson would be only a barrier to those interests. The girl had a certain amount of sweetness and refinement about her, but she was one

to be led by, and not to lead, anyone she loved. And Mr. Hathaway wanted some one to help to form his own manners, to give him that *savoir-faire* which is so essential to a man who has no good connections to fall back upon. In years to come, he would doubtless be thankful enough to the friend who would hold him now from committing himself to what by and by he could only regret very bitterly.

Mrs. Haythorne put up her easel and painting materials, and was herself again, courteous, calm, and ladylike, before Audrey came down for dinner.

Indeed perhaps, anyone less sensitive than Audrey to the slightest variations of mental atmosphere would never have seen, much less felt, that Mrs. Haythorne was not in the same mind now that she had been in a few hours before. But Audrey perceived it, and divined

that she was herself in some sort the cause of the disturbance.

Not that she could understand a character like Mrs. Haythorne's. In all her life she had never had to do with anyone who was not thoroughly open and straightforward. Mrs. Ferguson, though fussy and bustling and common-place, was a woman who never concealed her real motives in anything. Indeed she always had such good faith in the excellence of her own ways and doings that nothing was farther from her mind than any concealment of them. Rose Emma and Frances Ann, too, lived the whole of their lives upon the surface. There were no depths, either of feeling or contrivance, in their natures, into which they could not with the utmost complacency invite their friends and neighbours, one and all, to look. And little Miss Burnaby, she was open as

the day, so far as plans and purposes for her own advantage were concerned. The only thing she did not talk about on the housetops was that little castle in the air about Audrey and Phil; and was ever castle in the air built with a better good will than that? So that Audrey had no compass to guide her in navigating the shoals of intimacy with such a woman as Mrs. Haythorne.

There was something wrong. Her present relations with Phil had made her very sensitive. Any change in other people now, she fancied, must have some reference to him. What had she been doing? Certainly not manifesting any preference for him which could be called unmaidenly. But she had felt Mrs. Haythorne's eyes upon her once or twice as he chatted with her during Mr. Langton's call; felt them upon her with a look which implied displeasure.

And now there was a tone in Mrs. Haythorne's voice which, if it did not imply displeasure, implied a certain distance between them. She had something upon her mind. That made something upon Audrey's too.

They sat through dinner almost in silence. Mrs. Haythorne watched Audrey as narrowly as she could, without appearing to be watching her at all. She judged the girl rightly. A crafty nature always has the advantage of a simple one in that respect. It can make its observations through lenses and telescopes of which the simple one does not even know the uses. Audrey's soul lay mapped out before her companion more clearly than ever the acres and roods of Dimplethorpe had been noted down in any Doomsday book. She could put her finger on each act, each word, each look, and know what it all meant.

"I am afraid you do not feel very well to-night," she said, kindly, as they came back into the pretty drawing-room after dinner and drew their chairs into the bay-window, Mrs. Haythorne taking care to place Audrey's well in front of the light. "I daresay you find the weather a little trying."

"Oh ! no," said Audrey. "I am never anything but well. The weather never makes any difference to me."

"Does it not ? What a happy mortal you must be ! I would give anything to be able to say that for myself. The heat knocks me up directly. I thought you seemed quieter than usual this afternoon."

"Well, you see there were other people to talk. I did not feel that I was wanted to say anything."

"Except to Mr. Hathaway. You had a nice little chat with him whilst that stupid

Mr. Langton was boring me. I shall never hear the mention of stained glass now without yawning. And then it occurred to me that perhaps the smell of the oil colours made you feel faint."

"Well, perhaps the room was just a little close," said Audrey, glad to accept anything as an excuse for what Mrs. Haythorne appeared to think want of attention to the duties of social intercourse.

"Yes. Ah! then I was right. I will not let you be in the room when Mr. Hathaway comes to give me my lessons. I thought of sending over to ask if he could come the day after to-morrow. You know I have arranged to take a few lessons from him, and I told him I would just take them at his own time, but I daresay he will not like to propose a day, unless I mention it first. Now the smell of oil colours never affects *me* in the least."

“Nor does it me generally,” said Audrey. “I always paint up in my own little room at home, and I have never had a headache yet.”

But at the same time she determined that she would take Mrs. Haythorne’s hint, for she felt sure it *was* a hint, and keep to the school-room next time Mr. Hathaway came. Something in Mrs. Haythorne’s manner made her feel sure that there was a special meaning in every remark she uttered. And she felt more sure of it as the lady went on.

“Young Hathaway is wonderfully clever, is he not?”

“Yes. I believe most people think him so.”

“You used to know each other very well a long time ago, did you not?”

“Yes,” said Audrey, colouring slightly. And, though she felt it was very stupid, she

could say no more. A lump seemed to come in her throat.

“I thought you were old friends when you were talking together in the bay-window.”

And then there was a pause.

“I think you noticed that little sketch of mine which he was finishing when you came in.”

“Yes.”

And, spite of herself, Audrey felt the rosy colour burning in her cheeks again as she recalled the afternoon on which the study of that picture had been begun, Phil's good-bye kiss, and his promise to remember her. And connected with that, there came of course the recollection of his other visit just before he went to Paris, and the proposal made then.

“Ah! But I think I heard you tell Mr. Hathaway you remembered it. I did so

wish to ask both of you all about it, but I thought it would look perhaps like prying into affairs which I had no concern with. Only you know, when one is very much interested in a picture, one naturally wants to know the history of it. He is making that unfinished sketch of mine into a lovely little thing. But he says it is such a favourite subject of his."

Which remark did not make Audrey's colour less brilliant. She felt very guilty, and yet, as she said to herself over and over again, what was there to feel guilty about?

"I expect he will one day be one of our best artists," continued Mrs. Haythorne, carelessly toying with the blue silk of the convolvulus blossom she was embroidering. "I only hope he will not get himself entangled in any way before his position is really established. That is such a grievous mistake for a young man to make, and there

are always plenty of designing girls ready to take advantage of anyone who does not value his own talent as he ought to do."

Audrey knew well enough what that meant. If she had been half as clever as the Major's wife, she would have replied in an easy, trifling tone that it *was* indeed a great mistake for young men to entangle themselves before they knew what position they were really likely to achieve; that it often weighted them all through life, because the wives they chose were not able to rise with them, and she hoped Mr. Hathaway would have too much good sense to do anything of the sort. But not being half so clever as the Major's wife, indeed not being clever at all in that particular direction, she could only feel herself tingling down to her very finger-tips with shame and indignation, and her voice choked so that not a word would come in reply. She knew full well

now, and yet she could not appear to know without admitting that she was guilty, that she was one of the afore-mentioned designing girls who were always ready to take advantage of an inexperienced young man. So she was silent.

Mrs. Haythorne, watching her keenly, saw that her arrow had hit the bull's-eye. Miss Ferguson had taken the remark to herself, as it was intended she should do. Next time she met Mr. Hathaway, she would be as stiff and distant as possible. That too would be just as it was intended.

Not, as Mrs. Haythorne knew well enough, that the poor girl ever had had any designs upon him. She had learned Audrey's disposition, timid, self-distrustful, though she was not blest with it herself. She knew, too, how the manner which such a disposition produces, sometimes attracts a man, unless it can be bittered and made to lose its charm

by stiffness and constraint. And nothing would embitter Audrey's manner so much as having the thought suggested to her that she was endeavouring to catch Mr. Hathaway. It would rouse all the pride of her nature, it would shut her up within herself, it would spoil the only thing which made her charming now, self-unconsciousness.

Nobody knew better than Mrs. Haythorne the harmonies and discords of spiritual thorough-bass; how one note, judiciously struck with another, brings out the tone of each; how a discord well placed kills both; how a key-note skilfully anticipated leads on to the end; how an accidental sharp, introduced at the proper time, modulates the whole into a different key. She would have given all she had to be a sweet, simple country girl like Audrey Ferguson, able to win a man's heart by the mere fact of being herself. But since she could

not conquer by simplicity, the next best thing was to prevent herself from being conquered by it, to use her own subtler intellect to kill its charm. Should this innocent, pale-faced, pale-hearted girl be able to do what she, with all her skill and cleverness, could not accomplish?

“Yes,” she said, returning to the subject, “Mr. Hathaway is just the young man who might be imposed upon by a girl of that sort. You see he has so little appreciation of himself as yet. He does not really know what power there is in him. To think of his wasting himself upon an uneducated country girl, when, if he would only wait until he has attained his true position, he might marry into some really cultured and high-class family. It would be such a thousand pities.”

That was a new thought to Audrey. She had learned to own to herself that she

loved Phil Hathaway, but she had never thought of that love, if returned, as being a clog and hindrance to him. Indeed, like all other true love, it thought less of itself than of what it could do for its beloved. And if it could do only evil, why, then it must slay itself and say nothing of the pain. Audrey could do that for anyone she loved. Still it was hard to think of it, and go on smiling all the time. A faint, weary feeling came over her. If only Mrs. Haythorne would give over talking !

But Mrs. Haythorne apparently had no intention of giving over talking, or of talking on that one particular subject. And her next words pointed to a still more humiliating possibility.

“I mean to say something to him about it, some day. You know an old married woman like myself can often give a young man very useful advice, especially upon

such subjects, because people know she cannot possibly have any selfish feelings in the matter. And I have such an interest in Mr. Hathaway. I would do anything to prevent him from making a mistake which might blight his whole future life. I hope I am not too late. I had half an idea, from something he said this afternoon, that he may already have been drawn into some engagement of the sort."

Audrey pressed her lips together. Phil had evidently grown very intimate with Mrs. Haythorne in his two visits, but she did not know that he had become intimate enough to talk over his attachments, past or prospective. Had he been bringing her own name into the conversation? Had he been so far presuming upon her possible feelings towards him as to take for granted that she was ready to accept whenever he chose to give her the opportunity of doing so?

Or was it some other entanglement which he had been confiding to Mrs. Haythorne, and had he only been playing with her just to pass the time until he really made up his mind what would be best to do? Whichever way she looked, all was dark alike.

Mrs. Haythorne went on in her bright, eager, interested way, Audrey scarcely answering a word, until the shadows deepened and the embroideries and bronzes and fans and eastern baubles showed dim and colourless in the twilight. So had the beauty seemed to die out of Audrey's life within that last hour.

"I think I will go now," she said, rising with a quiet dignity which made her seem almost like another girl. "I daresay you will not mind my leaving you alone."

"Not in the least, thank you. I generally take a little turn up and down the garden

about this time. And I am sure you look ever so tired. Now confess, are you not?"

"I am very tired," said Audrey, quietly.

"Yes. I have talked you to death, almost. You see it is such a treat to me to have anyone to exchange my thoughts with. Good night."

## CHAPTER XVI.

**B**UT there was other talking to be done before that pleasant companionship, which Mrs. Haythorne had determined to have for herself alone, could be considered secure.

Audrey did not require twice telling that the painting lesson, next day but one, was not to be intruded upon. And Mrs. Haythorne had purposely fixed the hour early in the afternoon, whilst Victor had still a good spell of reading and geography, besides his daily walk, to be gone through; though she did not suppose, after what she had said,

in that most convenient after-dinner opportunity, that Miss Ferguson would make her appearance, even if Victor had not detained her in the school-room.

Phil did not keep his lady-pupil waiting long. Indeed he had been thinking about that lesson ever since Mrs. Haythorne had sent over to arrange it with him; thinking about that, and the pleasant, appreciative things which had been said to him. It was just what he wanted, to be encouraged by a woman who had the true love for art, and who understood, too, what real art was. To think what that little picture had been to her. To think that he, at the very outset of his career, whilst he had looked upon himself only as a learner, could be an influence to a woman like Mrs. Haythorne.

And then her faith in his future was so cheering. It did him good for anyone to have confidence in him like that.

Hitherto he had been with people who had only made him feel his deficiencies. Many and many a time, amongst those hard-working artists in Rome and Paris, he could have snapped his brushes asunder and flung his colours away. All that he could do appeared so poor, so mean, compared with what they had done, with what lay before him to be done. But now he was beginning to feel something like assurance of himself. Work of his had found its way to the hearts of other people. A door had been opened for him into the sunshine of success, and the hand that had opened it was Mrs. Haythorne's.

"I am so delighted to see you," she said as she came into the hall to meet him, and led him through into that cosy little drawing-room where all arrangements had been made for the painting lesson. "Are you quite sure, now, that I am not

making you waste your time very dreadfully?"

"On the contrary," said Phil, "I am quite sure that nothing could have helped me to employ it so well. You know I am not enough of a great man yet to be able to scorn giving lessons."

"Mr. Hathaway, I don't believe you half know what you are. And I am quite sure you don't know what you will be."

Mrs. Haythorne looked into his face with a wonderful light of confidence in her brown eyes, and Phil began to think that she must be right in her estimate of him. For what reason had she to flatter him? What could he, humble and unknown, do for her, that she should care to tell him other than the truth about himself? And hers was not the praise of an ignorant woman. She knew good, honest work when she saw it.

“I made the room all ready for you myself,” she said. “I know an artist can paint with so much more ease when everything is pleasant and pretty about him. Sometimes I have wasted a whole morning, really not done a single stroke to satisfy myself, and then I have found that some colour in the room was out of harmony. I daresay you know that sort of feeling well enough.”

“I do sometimes,” said Phil. “But I don’t think I shall know anything about it this afternoon.”

And he looked with a feeling of perfect content round the little room, where everything seemed to have a friendly relation with everything else. If possible it gave him a greater sense of harmony and comfort than when he had spent such a pleasant afternoon in it only a day or two ago. Where the difference was he could not tell, until Mrs. Haythorne explained it to him.

“I wanted everything to be as nice as possible for you, and so I had a curtain put up over that little side-window. I noticed, when you were painting here before, that the cross light vexed you, coming in there. I hope you like the curtain. It is a bit of Turkish embroidery. We brought it home with us last year, but I have never had it put up before. Somehow it always seemed too good to use, but I do not think so now.”

“You have taken far too much trouble for me,” said Phil, at the same time, however, very much pleased. He could not help again contrasting the subdued and harmonious colouring of the room with the chill regularity of Mrs. Ferguson’s newly fitted up “apartment,” where no softly tinted curtains, Turkish or otherwise, had ever been hung for his special convenience, though Audrey must have known as well as Mrs. Haythorne knew now, how much the comfort of an

artist depends upon these thoughtful little arrangements.

And Mrs. Haythorne had taken thought for him in other matters, too. An easy chair was drawn up not far from the easel, and on a table by it was a claret jug, the rosy wine gleaming through leaves and flowers of Venetian glass. His hostess was not all art, nor did she expect her visitors to be so. Everything was ready for him. Phil thought of Mrs. Ferguson bustling down stairs to the kitchen, and bidding the maid of all work fetch up the cold ham, and be sure to cream the right milk. There was something so distasteful in being admitted to all these little domestic arrangements. Certainly it was pleasant to be with perfectly well-bred people, to know that you had been thought for and prepared for, without any of the mechanism of it being thrust upon you.

"Shall we begin now?" said Phil, turning his easel so that the light should fall properly upon it.

"Certainly. Unless you like to rest awhile first."

"I am not at all tired. If I were, it would rest me even to be in this room."

"That is so kind of you. Somehow I felt you would like it when I had finished arranging everything. I tried to look at it, you know, with your eyes. I think I have a gift for putting myself in the place of other people, and imagining what they would like."

"I am sure you have," said Phil. And then the lesson began.

Mrs. Haythorne stood close by him, to make notes on her ivory tablets. She was a little behind him, for the better watching of the work, but that need not prevent him from admiring her if he were so disposed,

for they were both of them reflected in a long mirror just in front of the easel, and Phil had but to lift his eyes to meet hers there, full of intelligence and sympathy and eagerness, if he paused but for a moment to explain to her some little detail of outline or colouring.

“I was trying to work yesterday,” she said, after a while, idly swinging her tablets to and fro, “but it was not a bit of use. No, not yesterday, the day before, after you had been here, you know, telling me about that picture. Something vexed me, and I could not go on.”

Something about her husband, thought Phil, lifting his eyes and meeting hers in the mirror, full, as he thought, of shadowy regret. What a wasted life hers must be, with that handsome milliner’s block of a man who could appreciate no artistic thought, and encourage her in no lofty endeavour!

But of course he must not speak of these things. What Mrs. Haythorne had to suffer in her own home she suffered in silence. For him even to seem to know it would be an insult. So he only said,

“That was a pity. I have often felt so myself. It is a curious thing how one’s fingers seem tied and bound sometimes. The very colours lose all their glow. One can’t either realise or represent anything. I know what it means. I have lost many an hour in just the same way.”

“Not in *just* the same way, Mr. Hathaway. Because you did not know what it was that vexed me.”

“No.”

And again their eyes met. This time there was a sort of half playfulness in Mrs. Haythorne’s. She could scarcely be thinking of any sorrows of her own.

“I daresay,” she continued, “it was very

stupid of me to trouble myself about it, and yet one does find oneself sometimes troubling about other people's affairs. But perhaps—what was that colour you used just now, I mean to give the shadow to those flag leaves on the water?”

Phil showed her the label on the little flask.

“Thank you.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

PHIL painted on in silence. Mrs. Haythorne played with her ivory tablets, the great blue and green and crimson stones sparkling on her fingers as she did so. Again looking at her in the mirror, there was that half playful and now half serious expression in her eyes, which seemed to intimate to Phil that he might continue the subject which the flag-leaf shadows had interrupted.

“I hope, whatever difficulty it was, you were able to shape it out to your own satisfaction.”

“What do you mean?”

“I was going back to what you mentioned just now.”

“Oh, yes! when I could not get on with the picture. Well, that was just the very thing I was not able to do. I could *not* shape it out to my own satisfaction.”

“Then I hope you were able to let it drop and not trouble yourself any more about it.”

“No, I could not do that, either. I never can let anything drop which concerns my friends, or their interests. If it had been myself, I daresay I could have let it go. Indeed I have learned to think very little about things which only concern myself. I have had my day. I know both the best and worst of what can happen to me.”

This was the first time Mrs. Haythorne had said anything which could be construed

into a reference to her own personal life. It seemed to give Phil a new sense of intimacy with her. And yet it was not said in a manner which gave him leave to pursue the subject. He went on painting. He had come now to the little bit of grassy hollow, where, in the original, that figure of Audrey had been. But he did not intend to sketch Audrey in this one. It was to be a dark-complexioned girl, with a dash of scarlet about her, to bring out the shadows in the bit of overhanging bank.

“Mr. Hathaway.”

“Yes.”

“Should you be exceedingly vexed if I were to say something rather personal?”

“I don’t think,” replied Phil, “it would be possible for you to say anything that would really offend me. You have been so good to me that I could not suspect you of meaning anything unkind.”

And that was true. Mrs. Haythorne's thoughtfulness for him, this afternoon especially, had been so unexpected and complete. He felt sure that whatever she might say could be only for his good.

"I would not say it at all, if I had not been thinking a great deal about it, and if I did not feel interest enough in your future, even to risk offending you for the sake of what I feel to be my duty."

Phil thought she was going to say something to him about living in old Ben Hathaway's cottage. It *was* a tumble-down sort of a place for a man who wanted to keep up any respectability in a village like Dimplethorpe, although both Miss Burnaby and the General said he had done very well in taking up his abode there. But then the General and Miss Burnaby looked upon him in entirely a different manner from Mrs. Haythorne. In all the years he had known

them, they had never admitted him to the same sort of intimacy which Mrs. Haythorne was ready to accord. They were his patrons, kind and obliging and helpful, but still in a measure behaving to him as some one quite out of their own sphere. They could not forget that he had once been a basket-maker. Now Mrs. Haythorne, though of course in common with everyone else in the place she knew all about the basket-making, had never actually seen him amongst the willow wands. To her it was only a tradition. She was generously ready to take him for what he was, without any reference to the past. And seeing that he was now received in her house as a gentleman on his own account, it had once or twice occurred to him that perhaps it might be rather embarrassing to her to have a friend living in such a very unconventional style as that which he was obliged to

submit to under Harriet Brown's system of housekeeping. Now that the lessons had begun, she might be intending to hint something of the kind to him. He thought he had better accept the situation boldly.

"Do you mean about the cottage? I know some people think I am rather letting myself down. Of course it is not the sort of place I should live in if I had more money ; but as things are now——"

"As things are now, it is a very sensible thing for you to do. I have no doubt you will find your way out of it before long, because people do naturally mix a man up with his surroundings, and you would have a better position in the place if you could be at that nice little house of Miss Parley's. But that is not what I was going to speak about. I know you well enough to be sure that the house you live in would never make any difference to your real self. What I was

thinking about is something which touches you much more closely."

Phil's curiosity was wide awake now. That the handsomest, most stylish woman in Dimplethorpe, the queen of the place, who could command any amount of admiration from everybody in it, should trouble herself about his affairs, and so much as to prevent her from taking pleasure in her favourite pursuit, was, to say the least of it, very flattering to his self-esteem.

"People *do* make such mistakes in that way," she said, impetuously, "and then there is no going back again."

Phil looked at her in the mirror. There was just a touch of annoyance and impatience in her face.

"What I mean is this. In a gossiping place like Dimplethorpe, one is always hearing some small talk or other about persons one knows, and probably what I

heard had not the least foundation, but, at the same time, I cannot tell you how it vexed me. It was something about your being engaged. Your name was mixed up with Miss Ferguson's in a way which I am sure would have been unpleasant to you."

Mrs. Haythorne took care not to meet Phil's eyes in the mirror now. She twisted her tablets about and turned her face away from him, but not before she had noticed how the colour deepened upon his. But he made no reply.

After a little while she said—

"May I go on, Mr. Hathaway?"

"Yes, you may. I am sure you would not say anything unless you thought you had a reason for it. Though it is not from many ladies that I should be willing to receive advice on such a subject."

"You would not be much of a man if you could, Mr. Hathaway."

And that she said it convinced Phil, if he needed convincing, that she knew what she was talking about. Here was no vulgar, empty-minded woman, intruding into what she had no concern with. She was saying what she had to say, with an evident effort. She only said it at all because she had his real welfare at heart. She might be right, or she might be wrong, but at any rate she was earnest.

“I should despise a man,” she continued, “who allowed any woman to interfere with him in that matter. And if I had believed what I heard, I should never have said a word to you about it. Of course you have a right to judge for yourself. But I do not believe it, and so I do speak, for you have promised not to be offended with me.”

Phil, with a slightly trembling hand, sketched in the little figure which was to have been Audrey. It seemed to shape

itself now into the smaller gracefulness of Mrs. Haythorne.

“Not that there is not something exceedingly agreeable about Miss Ferguson, no one can speak more decidedly about that than myself, for she has been, as I have often said, quite a companion to me lately; and if you were going to settle down here all your life, just as you are now, I should say it would be the most delightful thing in the world for you. But it is such a mistake, Mr. Hathaway, for a man like you, with a great future before him, the power of making almost anything he likes of himself, to tie himself down before his life has even begun to develop itself.”

Mrs. Haythorne faced round upon him now with a look of eager earnestness in her fine eyes. And she spoke hurriedly, as if anxious to get to the end of what she had to say.

“I have seen that sort of thing. I know how it often ends. A man cannot tell what is in store for him sometimes. He has no self-appreciation, and he does what can never be undone. You have no idea of what you may be in ten years’ time.”

“Nor has Miss Ferguson of what she may be,” replied Phil, quietly.

“Well, then, I will not go on.”

And Mrs. Haythorne was herself again, quiet, calm, courteous, with perhaps just a little touch of coldness in her manner.

“I beg your pardon,” Phil said. “I did not mean that, at all. I hope you did not think I could mean that, and when your intentions are so kind. I was not bringing my own personal feelings into the matter at all. I was only——”

Phil was conscious that he was not speaking the whole truth, but still he was so anxious that Mrs. Haythorne should go on.

He wanted to hear what she had to say, and he could make it so much more easy for both of them by giving her to understand that his remarks had not a direct personal application to himself.

“I was only going to say that a girl’s mind and tastes may grow too. I should rather think that Miss Ferguson has a nature that could expand with circumstances. But do tell me exactly what you think. It is interesting to me to know. Not that what you tell me will really be of any use, for I may very frankly say that I have no prospects of that kind.”

“Then why should I talk?”

“Because some day I may have, and then I shall be in a position to profit by what you are good enough to tell me now. And even if I never should have, still the experience of a friend whom one can trust is always valuable.”

Mrs. Haythorne smiled again.

“Well then, as I was saying to you, you have no idea of what you will be in ten years’ time. At present nobody knows you, except by a little picture or two, at least nobody who has not the real love for art. But I can see such a different future for you, when you come to your full strength. You will then be able to choose your own equal from women of such a different class. I do not want you to go and throw yourself away now, and afterwards wake to find yourself bound hand and foot in fetters that you can never break asunder. It is such a weary thing to have no sympathy in one’s best intellectual life. I know what *that* is, well enough to wish anyone I care for, far away from it.”

Phil Hathaway turned, and for one moment the two looked each other in the face. Mrs. Haythorne’s eyes were full of tears.

She had become earnest in spite of herself. Then she dashed them away, and began to busy herself with the tablets again.

“Thank you very much, Mrs. Haythorne,” said Phil, gently. “It is very good of you to have said this to me. I shall not forget how kind you have been.”

And then, for he saw that she could scarcely keep back the tears, he began searching amongst his colours.

“I believe I have been very stupid. I have forgotten to bring some red which I wanted for this bit of foreground. I was beginning a sketch in my room this morning, and I suppose I left it there. I wonder if you could find me some amongst your colours. It does seem a pity to have to leave that bit of bank unfinished.”

“Yes. I will go and look.”

Mrs. Haythorne understood that he only said this to give her an opportunity of going

away for a few moments, to recover herself, and it added a touch of gratitude to what before had only been a craving for admiration. When she came back, there was a fresh link between them. She had appealed to his sympathy. She had as it were torn the veil from her own life, and, in showing him its need for pity, had revealed to him what he could give, whereas before he had looked upon himself only as her debtor.

There was not much more conversation, and that little was kept to the subject of the painting. Mrs. Haythorne did not touch any further either upon her own personal life or his.

“I do not think you ought to stay longer,” she said, when the couple of hours, which had been named as the limit of the lesson, had passed. “I must not forget that your time is very valuable. Will you let me know when you can come again

without breaking in upon your work at home?"

"I will come whenever you like," said Phil. "I have no work at home at present which will not be very profitably exchanged for work here with you."

"Thank you. Another time we will keep to our painting. Talking about these other things tires one too much. I really don't know why I should have troubled myself about you to such an extent. I never did it for anyone else. But somehow I felt, from almost the very first, that I had it to say to you."

"And I shall always remember, Mrs. Haythorne, how kindly you have said it."

"Shall you? Then that is all right. But I should like you to tell me, before you go away, that you are not in the least offended by what I have said to you."

For reply Philip Hathaway only shook hands with her and said—

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Haythorne.”

But it was said so as to convince the lady that, whatever else she might have done, she had certainly not offended her new friend.

He was half way across the garden, and she was watching him from the window, when he chanced to turn, and she beckoned him back.

“Oh! Mr. Hathaway, I want to come and see your pictures some day. Will you let me?”

“I will bring them to you,” said Phil, reddening at the thought of that upper room with the bundles of osiers amongst its roof-beams still.

“Oh! no. I could not think of giving you that trouble. As soon as Major Haythorne returns, we will come together. I am sure he will be delighted to see them

too. And I think an artist's pictures always look so much better in his own studio. We may come, then?"

"Certainly."

And Phil went away, determined that, before the Major came home, he would remove himself and his belongings to Miss Parley's cosy little rooms near the vicarage. Mrs. Haythorne having said once that that would be just the place for a young artist to establish himself in. And then he should not be ashamed of anyone, not even the mistress of Meadowfield Lodge, coming to call upon him.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

AUDREY, sitting in the school-room upstairs, a little flat-windowed room with cold walls, cold ceiling, cold curtains, cold everything, a very marked contrast to the artistic and harmonious comfort of Mrs. Haythorne's dominions below, watched Phil Hathaway come, herself quite unseen as she sat at the table, putting little Master Victor through the mysteries of simple subtraction.

How briskly he came up the garden, with the air of a man who has something pleasant before him. Phil had never what could be called a strut, but still there was a cheeriness

in his step when the end of the journey brought him something worth going for, and that cheeriness was noticeable enough now.

Mrs. Haythorne should not have to complain that any of the conversation was taken out of her hands this time. Nothing but the very direst necessity would have induced Audrey Ferguson to cross the young artist's path, after what had been said to her about him, a couple of days before. Accordingly, when Victor's lessons were over, she proposed that he should go out for a walk with her, and she kept him rambling in the fields until she supposed Phil would have got safely back to Harriet Brown's cottage.

Mrs. Haythorne's lesson, however, had lasted rather longer than Audrey had arranged for. As she was coming with little Victor up the narrow secluded lane which led from the village to the Manor House, she saw, two or three hundred

yards in front of her, Phil Hathaway walking slowly in a direction to meet her.

Walking slowly, not as she had seen him come into the Lodge garden a couple of hours before, brisk, upright, cheery. His portfolio was left behind, a sign that he was coming again before long, his head was down, he seemed to be in a brown study as he paced along, kicking the little bits of stone and gravel before him.

Audrey could quite understand why he should look so different. Mrs. Haythorne had been speaking to him, as she said she should, about the danger, or rather folly, of premature engagements; warning him against being drawn in by any designing girl who would cheerfully mar all his future for the sake of settling herself, as she thought, advantageously in life. And most probably names had been mentioned.

Audrey must meet him; there was no

way of escape. If only there had been a stile or a by-lane, or a cottage to have turned into ; but there the road lay, straight before her, with no means of exit but a five-barred gate or two, which Victor could not climb if she could. There was nothing for it but to walk straight on and look as unconcerned as possible.

She need not have troubled herself. Phil did not seem to see her until they were close upon each other. Then he pulled himself together, gave a friendly nod to Victor, said—"Good afternoon, Miss Ferguson," and passed on.

"Miss Ferguson." So it had come to that. However, it was much better that they should understand each other. Quite as carelessly as he had given the greeting, she responded to it, and thought he had gone on his way. But he turned back.

"I suppose you are staying with Mrs. Haythorne altogether now, but you go over to the Moat House now and then, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you shall be seeing your mother before next Sunday?"

"Oh, yes! I go down most days."

"Well, then, will you say that I don't think I shall be able to come on Sunday evening? She stopped me yesterday and said I must come, for you were going to be at home; but I can't manage, so ask her to excuse me."

"Very well," said Audrey, quietly, "I will tell her not to look for you."

"You see Vincent and Tewksby are not exactly friends of mine."

"I see. Come along, Victor, we must not stay."

For Victor had caught sight of the little

compass which hung from Phil's watch-chain, and remembered that Phil had promised him a sight of it some day. Victor thought there was no time like the present, and he was resolute in his demands that they should all stop, there and then, until he had examined the pretty toy to his heart's content.

"No, Victor. I wish you to come away at once," said Audrey, her cheeks burning and her lips trembling. "You must show him it some other time, Mr. Hathaway. Good afternoon."

And so she got away. She felt very angry and very bitter. There was no doubt now about what Mrs. Haythorne had been saying. She had been warning him against getting mixed up with people of inferior position, as well as getting entangled by designing girls. And he had taken the warning, and was showing her, by his

distant manner now, and by his hints as to the society which he met at the Moat House, that it was necessary for him to be on his guard. He should not need to remind her again.

“Well, Miss Ferguson, did the little boy get the giant’s heart, after all?”

This was said in Victor’s tiny treble; for, before that meeting with Phil Hathaway, Audrey had been telling him the story of the giant’s heart which was hidden in the eagle’s nest on the top of a mountain. And Victor, being disappointed of a peep into the mariners’ compass, thought that the remainder of the story was the least compensation which could be offered, under the circumstances.

“Oh, wait awhile, Victor!” said Audrey, struggling hard with tears of mingled pride and humiliation. “You know we have

been walking a long way now, and I am tired."

"But you can't be tired all at once, Miss Ferguson. You were going on with it all right before Mr. Hathaway came up," persisted the little fellow, with the authoritative manner of the young Anglo-Indian who has been accustomed to get whatever he likes by asking for it. "And why wouldn't you let Mr. Hathaway show me the pretty things, and why did you stop everything when he came?"

In terror lest the questions should be repeated in Mrs. Haythorne's presence when they got home, Audrey began, and toiled for the twentieth time through the children's adventures in search of the giant's heart, concluding with the triumphant explosion of the heart itself, when the requisite amount of spider juice had been poured upon it.

Things had just come to this much-to-be-desired consummation when they reached the Lodge garden, and Victor, bounding up to his Mamma, who was walking up and down the verandah, told her all about it.

“They put the stuff upon it, and it burst into ever so many pieces, Mamma. Wasn’t it fun? I was very much afraid Miss Ferguson wasn’t going to tell me it really properly, for we met Mr. Hathaway, and then she turned ever so quiet, and said she was tired.”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Haythorne, in the gentlest of voices, taking in the whole state of affairs at a glance, “you should never tease Miss Ferguson when she is tired.”

“Oh! but, Mamma, I didn’t see how she could *really* have been tired, for she had been telling me it ever so nicely before Mr. Hathaway came up, and I wanted to play with the pretty thing on his watch-chain, and

she wouldn't let me do that, so it was only fair I should get the rest of the story, and so I bored her till she did. And oh! Miss Ferguson, what made you vexed? Are you very sorry Mr. Hathaway can't go to your Mamma on Sunday? I didn't know you had a Mamma. Is she like mine?"

For once Audrey was thankful to be able to answer that question most decidedly in the negative.

"But come with me, Victor. I will tell you another story in the school-room."

"No, Miss Ferguson," said Mrs. Haythorne, gently, "if you are tired I am sure you will like to be alone. I will not let Victor plague you just now. He shall stay with me awhile, until you are rested. Come, my boy."

Audrey, seeing there was no help for it, went away; and Mrs. Haythorne, who was not above doing things in a slightly round-about way when anything was to be gained

by it, put little Victor through his catechism in a manner most satisfactory to herself.

Yes; they had met Mr. Hathaway, and Victor had wanted to see the compass, but Miss Ferguson had said they must not stay, and she turned so very quiet, and there was no laugh in her face at all, and she went on just as if something had happened to put her out of temper.

“What, without even shaking hands with Mr. Hathaway, Victor? Mr. Hathaway who paints the pretty pictures?”

“Oh! *no*, Ma, not shaking hands at all, and I am sure she was very much thinking of something else. And then Mr. Hathaway said he could not go to see Miss Ferguson’s Mamma on Sunday. Was he going to have a nice cup of tea with her, Mamma, like you give him.”

“I am sure I don’t know, Victor. Very likely he was. And I should think he would

be very sorry not to be able to go."

"Oh! no, Ma. I don't think he was *very* sorry, and he didn't say so one bit like you always say you are very sorry when you can't go anywhere. Perhaps, Ma, he didn't want to go very much. And then he said good-bye to us, and I wanted Miss Ferguson to finish the story."

"Yes, darling, of course."

"But she didn't do it of course, Ma. She said she was so very tired, and she looked as if she almost wanted to cry. You don't ever get so tired as that, do you, Mamma?"

"Poor Miss Ferguson! You shall go upstairs and take her a glass of wine. No, dear, Mamma never takes such long walks, and so Mamma does not get tired."

Mamma went to the sideboard and poured out a glass of sherry.

"Here, Victor, take this to Miss Ferguson, and say I think it will do her good."

“And mayn’t I have just a little, Mamma? Because, you know, I have had a long walk too, quite as long as Miss Ferguson. I begin to feel tired too, I think, Mamma.”

“No, darling, little boys do not drink wine. It is only for grown-up people. Now carry it very carefully, and be sure you do not spill any.”

Victor set off with due caution, holding the glass very firmly in both little hands and making a succession of funny grimaces in the effort to keep it steady as he went upstairs. When he reached the school-room landing, his sense of moral rectitude failed him, and he took just a sip for himself, an iniquity which of course Mrs. Haythorne would have punished severely had she known of it. Because, though it was quite right for her to drink up, metaphorically speaking, the whole of poor Miss Ferguson’s

glass of wine, still one could not apply the same principle to children. *They* must be taught to be strictly honourable. Just as we send the man to prison who steals turnips and hides them in the pocket of a ragged coat, while we invite to dinner the bank swindler who filches his thousands from the widow and orphan, and invests them in pockets quite the reverse of ragged. One has to recognise differences, or life would not be worth living.

Audrey dashed the tears out of her eyes as little Victor, without the ceremony of knocking, came to bring the glass of wine, diminished by that tiny bit of dishonourableness.

"Oh! please, Miss Ferguson, Mamma says you are to drink this, it will do you good. And please may I just have one little drop, for bringing it upstairs?"

"You might have it all, Victor, if it was

good for you. I am sure I do not want it. But little boys should not drink wine."

"No, Miss Ferguson, I know that," said Master Victor, with more than his Mamma's fine sense of right and wrong. "At least you know they ought not to drink a great deal. I do not think one little drop would hurt me. And you know I told Mamma *all* about it, that you were so tired after we had met Mr. Hathaway, and that he couldn't come to see you on Sunday, and Mamma said it was a pity. Was he going to have tea out of pretty cups, like the people have when they come here?"

"I am sure I don't know, Victor, only run away and let me be quiet."

"Yes, Miss Ferguson."

And away went Victor, carefully draining the sherry glass as he came downstairs. Mrs. Haythorne was waiting to receive it,

and any information which might be forthcoming.

“Well, darling. You did not spill one drop, did you?”

“No, Mamma, not one single drop; wasn’t I a good boy?”

“Very indeed. And had Miss Ferguson taken off her bonnet?”

“No, Ma, she hadn’t taken off anything at all. And please, ma, I am sure she had been crying, so she *must* be very tired, because, you know, I never cry unless I am, *oh!* so tremendously done up, like when we have walked all that way to where the dogs and horses come. And I told Miss Ferguson you were very sorry, and you said the wine would do her good.”

“Good boy, Victor.”

## CHAPTER XIX.

IF Audrey could have flung herself down on the floor in the school-room and had a good cry, but even that poor comfort was denied to her.

Whilst Major Haythorne was up in Scotland, reminding his friend's grouse of the brevity of life, she was, at least when school hours were over, Mrs. Haythorne's guest, receiving from Mrs. Haythorne all the courtesy and attention due to a lady in that position, and equally bound to show to her hostess all the amenities of social intercourse. And, therefore, instead of indulging her own

private griefs in the school-room, she must make the usual change in her toilette, and put on a bit of rose ribbon to relieve the paleness of her cheeks, and coil up her loose brown hair, and make her appearance in the drawing-room, ready, if need be, for a little pleasant conversation before dinner was announced. Very pleasant conversation with the lady who had just heard all about her from Victor, and who had been so good as to send her up a glass of wine to heal the wound which Mr. Hathaway's behaviour during that encounter in Dimplethorpe lane must doubtless have inflicted.

Should she, or should she not?

There was but one of two courses to adopt. Either she must ring the bell and send a message down to the effect that she should not be able to make her appearance at dinner, so laying herself open to the horrors of a visit of condolence from Mrs.

Haythorne, who, whatever else she did, would never omit anything which appeared to be part of the duties of a hostess, and who would know very well, all the time she was prescribing sal volatile and smelling salts, what was really the state of the case; or she must boldly face things as they were, beautify herself to the best of her ability, sit with all due politeness and pleasantness through a *tête-à-tête* dinner, and behave to Mrs. Haythorne, for the time being, as though they were the best of possible friends. Afterwards——

But Audrey had already made up her mind what was to be done afterwards.

So she dressed herself and came down as if nothing had happened.

Nay, not quite as if nothing had happened. For there was a new sort of dignity about her now, the dignity which comes of conquest, the dignity which naturally clothes a

straightforward woman in the presence of another who is not straightforward. With one quick glance into Audrey's eyes, Mrs. Haythorne learned that her roundabout ways, though successful, had been found out, and she hated her guest accordingly.

"You are tired, I daresay," she said, languidly, as Audrey went to a seat in the window, and drew up a footstool, and took a peacock-feather fan to shield her eyes from the level darting sunlight of that early August afternoon.

"Yes, I am rather tired. I do not care to talk."

Mrs. Haythorne drew herself up a little. There was entirely a different manner about the girl. This was not the Miss Ferguson who had moved about so meekly and humbly; who had taken such pains to adapt herself to the necessities of her hostess; who, if that hostess seemed to wish for

quietness, had betaken herself to books and work, or, if the hostess desired conversation, had been ready with that too, sinking her own ways and wishes entirely to meet those of other people. Now she seemed to be taking upon herself more the privileges of a guest in the house. One could almost think she was beginning to look upon it as *her* place to be considered. Mrs. Haythorne, whose perception was microscopic in its accuracy, detected the change at once.

“Do you feel inclined to play to me a little before dinner?” said the Major’s wife, with what, if Audrey’s perception had been as microscopic as her own, might have been considered a touch of spiteful sarcasm in her voice. If the perception was not microscopic, it might pass for mere want of observation.

But Audrey only leaned back with more entire carelessness in the deep-seated easy

chair, and adjusted its cushions so that they should give her the greatest possible amount of comfort.

“Thank you, I think I would rather wait a little, until I am rested. That is if you do not mind.”

“Oh! no, not in the least. Only you do sometimes like to play a few of those Scotch tunes before dinner.”

Could Lady Laxby herself have been more independent, that is if Lady Laxby had condescended to dine at Meadowfield Lodge? Was Miss Ferguson going to put on airs? And so very obliging as she had always shown herself before. If she was offended at what had been said to her an evening or two before, and was taking this method of showing it, Mrs. Haythorne would nip that sort of thing in the bud.

“I daresay you have had a trying afternoon. Victor said you seemed very tired.

Did you have an unusually long walk?"

"Oh, no. Just through the cornfields."

"Dear me! To think that it should have tired you so. Victor seemed dreadfully afraid he should lose the end of his story, poor little man! But it was very good of you to finish it for him, under the circumstances."

"I don't think so. I never like to disappoint children. Victor knows I always do what I promise."

Dignity again. Mrs. Haythorne smiled.

"He is an observant little fellow, is he not? I don't believe anything escapes that child."

Miss Ferguson should see at any rate that Mrs. Haythorne knew something of what had been going on.

"He may be observant," said Audrey.  
"I have not noticed it particularly."

"Have you not? I should have thought

it would be the very first thing to strike you. Of course I never let him chatter to me about what he has noticed, or else I assure you I should be a perfect emporium of information about everything that goes on both in and out of the house. He seems to have been greatly mystified by an encounter between you and Mr. Hathaway this afternoon, and he was very anxious to give me a circumstantial account of it. But of course I would not let him do anything of the sort. I think it is such an unwise thing to let children see that what they say is of any importance."

"Especially when it really is not," said Audrey, drawing one of Mrs Haythorne's embroidered curtains so that the sun should smite upon that, instead of upon her cheek. How little impression this woman could make upon her now! With what entire calmness she could turn aside the stings

which were meant to wound so deeply! She seemed to herself scarcely the same who had listened two days ago, and taken every word like a poisoned arrow into her heart.

“I suppose you met him,” continued Mrs. Haythorne, “as he was coming away from here. You know he has been giving me a lesson this afternoon.”

“Has he?” said Audrey. “I thought perhaps you had been giving *him* one.”

Mrs. Haythorne coloured.

This, and from Mrs. Ferguson’s daughter, was rather too much. Perhaps there was something in the girl more than she had suspected under that quiet manner. Had she indeed a spirit that could assert itself, and, more daring still, turn round and aim an arrow at its persecutors?

Miss Ferguson knew what she had been doing, and, more than that, she was not

afraid of letting her see that she knew. If this sort of thing went on much longer, it would develop itself into actual defiance on the part of this meek girl, to whom she had extended so much patronising kindness. They were at open battle now. The girl was showing what she could do in the way of self-defence. There was something wonderfully irritating in that calm, quiet, sarcastic manner. Mrs. Haythorne had always considered herself sole mistress of that weapon, and very efficient she had found it upon occasion, chiefly with the Major. But here was the girl whom for her own private ends she was injuring, showing her so quietly that she knew how to choose her defences from the same armoury.

And knew how to use them too, in such a quiet, ladylike way, a sort of way that you could not take any notice of. For Miss Ferguson was her guest. Something in the

girl's manner showed that, and intimated that she meant now, for the first time, to maintain the position which Mrs. Haythorne had asked her to take during the Major's absence. It was provoking, and so utterly unexpected. But this sort of thing must be put a stop to in some way. She looked steadily at Audrey, lying back at ease there in one of the most comfortable chairs in the room.

"I beg your pardon. I think I did not understand. I said Mr. Hathaway had been giving *me* a lesson this afternoon."

"And I think you *did* understand when I said I thought you had been giving *him* one."

"Certainly. What I did not understand was your mentioning it to me in that manner. I think I told you that I should consider it my duty to say something to him. I always feel so sorry when I see young men

being misled in any way, and especially young men who do not look keenly after their own interests, as evidently he does not. However, so far as *he* is concerned—” And there was any amount of meaning in Mrs. Haythorne’s voice and look. “So far as *he* is concerned, I believe it was perfectly unnecessary for me to have troubled myself about it.”

“I am quite of the same opinion, Mrs. Haythorne.”

Mrs. Haythorne opened her eyes. Really, what would Miss Ferguson say to her next?

After that there was a pause. Mrs. Haythorne was trembling with half-suppressed wrath. Audrey sat there, apparently quiet as any marble statue. Indeed there was not much need for her to trouble herself, for she had made up her mind what to do, and was only waiting for the proper time to do it.

“Miss Ferguson, might I trouble you to put that curtain back? I never draw it for my own convenience. The sun, just at this time of the year, is so apt to fade the colours.”

Clewer, the parlour-maid, entered to announce dinner.

With the most perfect *insouciance*, Audrey said,

“Clewer, will you put back this curtain?”

Which Clewer did. And then the ladies went in to dinner.

Since Audrey had been staying at the Lodge, in Major Haythorne’s absence, she had invariably waited for Mrs. Haythorne to accord to her the position of guest in going into the dining-room, and Mrs. Haythorne had as scrupulously observed this courtesy. This time Audrey did not wait, but quietly went in first, a piece of presumption on her part which was as fully

equivalent to a declaration of war as the flinging back of Mrs. Ferguson's cap-strings used to be, in those old days when the minister of Dimplethorpe suffered so meekly the burden of his wife's superior executive-ness.

Under the circumstances, Mrs. Haythorne could not but let it pass. To hurry forward and assert her own rights, even if, by asking Audrey to be her guest, she had not waived them, would have been impossible. But if the young lady did not understand her place better than that, she should be taught.

Soup was disposed of in silence. Clewer made her appearance with a side-dish to be handed round.

"Bring it to *me*," said Mrs. Haythorne, with great dignity. And the parlour-maid, who was, according to custom, taking it to Audrey, obeyed.

Mrs. Haythorne thought that would per-

haps show the young lady how she was expected to behave.

Audrey said nothing until Clewer had gone out of the room, and then, with the utmost gravity and quietness, she asked—

“Mrs. Haythorne, am I dining here as Victor’s governess or as your guest?”

It was an embarrassing question, as Mrs. Haythorne had answered it for herself from the beginning, by asking Audrey to stay with her, as a friend, during the Major’s absence. However, for the sake of a present victory, she was obliged to contradict her past course of action, and she replied, with a glance intended to annihilate Miss Ferguson upon the spot—

“As Victor’s governess, without a doubt.”

“Then, Mrs. Haythorne, will you allow me to resign the position?”

And, with a quiet self-possession which

the greatest lady in the county could not have surpassed, Miss Ferguson, bowing to her ex-hostess, rose and left the room.

Mrs. Haythorne was checkmated.

## CHAPTER XX.

YES, indeed, Mrs. Haythorne *was* check-mated.

Never in her life before, not even when standing up at the altar in that mouldy little London church, promising to love, honour, and obey a man for whom she had no sentiment whatever save that of contemptuous indifference, had she felt quite so small and mean, quite so little of a lady.

However, it was impossible just then to take any notice of what had happened, beyond explaining to the parlour-maid, when she came into the room again, that Miss Ferguson was ill and had gone to lie down.

And, to keep up appearances, she ordered that a cup of tea should be prepared and taken to her at once. It was just as well to let one's servants think that one was a model of thoughtful kindness.

"See that it is made strong, Clewer. Do not put sugar and cream in it, but carry both up with you. Miss Ferguson has had a very long walk, and overtired herself."

"Yes, Ma'am," said Clewer, and Miss Ferguson was waited upon accordingly.

And now what should Mrs. Haythorne do?

Should she send up a polite note along with the cup of tea, intimating that the young lady's services were no longer required? Yet that would scarcely be expedient; for changing was such a nuisance, and Victor was really improving wonderfully, and if she sent Miss Ferguson away at a moment's notice, she should have the

child thrown upon her hands, just when she wanted to be most at liberty to enjoy what stupid little Dimplethorpe had to give in the shape of artistic companionship.

Besides, Miss Ferguson could only leave Meadowfield Lodge to be taken up more violently than ever by Miss Burnaby, who seemed to be perfectly infatuated by the girl. Miss Burnaby would never believe anything against her, nor would she let Mr. Hathaway believe anything either. And whatever side the General and his sister took in any matter, Mr. Hathaway, for the sake of his own interests, would have to take too. So that by behaving with open severity to Miss Ferguson, she would probably lose, not only a very efficient governess, but three pleasant friends, one of them the friend whom, above all others, it would be amusing and entertaining to keep at her side.

It was a pity she had overshot her mark. But how could she have foreseen that a girl apparently so meek and subdued, so unconscious of her own abilities, so wanting in self-assertion of any kind, should have turned upon her in that way? It was most unlooked for. If Miss Ferguson had been the outcome of centuries of culture and refinement, she could but have stood up for herself in that independent way. What a nuisance! And when Mrs. Haythorne had only just meant to make her understand that Mr. Hathaway was not the sort of man to be tied down for life to an ordinary country girl, when, if he waited a few years, he might choose a wife amongst the most refined families of London society.

Perhaps, on the whole, it would be better to overlook the matter. Miss Ferguson would doubtless repent of what was only a little outbreak of temper. Mrs. Haythorne

made up her mind to accept graciously the apology which, before many hours had passed, would doubtless be tendered, and next morning they would meet as though nothing had happened. She was quite aware that not many women would behave so generously under the circumstances, but on the whole it would suit her own interests just as well to do so, and Miss Ferguson could be made to understand at some future opportunity how very inconsistent her conduct had been.

Audrey, however, took that matter into her own hands. Whilst that cup of tea, which was to convince Clewer of her mistress's tender thoughtfulness, was preparing, the young governess wrote a note, dismissing herself from the position she had for the last six months occupied at Meadowfield Lodge. And by the time Mrs. Haythorne, toying over a bit of preserved gin-

ger, had made up her mind what would be best to do under the circumstances, she was well on her way to the Moat House, which she reached soon after dark.

She came up to it by the back-road leading along the side of the moat. The place looked pleasant and comfortable, though it lacked the refinement of Dr. Fylingdale's villa residence, where she had been so courteously entertained for the last few days. There was a look of welcome about the rows of raspberry and gooseberry bushes, and the great beds of rhubarb which grew right up to the study window; and there was a pleasant glow of firelight from the back parlour, where Cousin Tholthorpe, who always "felt the cold a deal," was mending the family linen as usual in her arm-chair.

"Gracious, Audrey child!" said Mrs. Ferguson, very nearly letting fall a whole apron-

ful of plums which she had been gathering for a tart for Sunday's dinner, "who ever would have thought of seeing you at this time of night? Rose Emma had forgotten the fruit, as she often does now that Mr. Tewksby is scarcely ever out of the house, and I had just slipped out to gather it while there was time to see. You did give me such a start. Is it clean body linen, or what is it? I thought you had taken what would last you until the Major came home."

"No, mamma, I don't want anything to take back with me. Don't trouble."

"I wasn't going to, Audrey. You always manage nicely, so I can trust you; but the wash is all got up and put away, if a few things were necessary, and I could have sent them with Abigail when everything was tidied out of the way. You're just in time to have a bit of supper. Rose Emma and Mr. Tewksby are out walking, and they

said they should be ready for something by nine; or else in a general way we don't sit down to anything, now that we have put the tea to half-past six. And then there's the going back to Mrs. Haythorne's, and late as it will be. Now, if it had been Sunday, Mr. Hathaway would have set you, for I asked him to come and have tea, as you would be here."

"He isn't coming, mamma. I met him when I was taking Victor for a walk this afternoon, and he asked me to tell you not to expect him."

"Dear me! Going to Mrs. Haythorne's, maybe."

"I don't know at all. He only said he could not come. I asked no questions."

"No, child, nor didn't need to. He may come or let it alone, just as he chooses. I'm not the woman to call anyone twice when I think once is enough. And you

can see him often enough up at the Lodge. They say he goes there as much as he doesn't. Your cousin Tholthorpe says it's easy enough to see why."

And Mrs. Ferguson gathered together her apronful of plums with a slightly ag-grieved air. Audrey had refused Mr. Barraclough about a fortnight before. Mr. Hathaway might be thinking about her, or he might not. Certainly he did not seem very much inclined to live up to the privileges offered to him at the Moat House.

"It is not what you think, mamma," said Audrey, quietly. "Cousin Tholthorpe is quite mistaken. Please do not say any more about it."

"Very well, then ; if it isn't what I think, all I can say is, so much more the pity, and you giving the answer you did to Mr. Barraclough. He's a young man, Audrey, that

would have made you comfortable, and me, and all the family too."

"I am very sorry, mamma, but we cannot make these things go just as we like."

"No, child, you're right. And I'm sure, if you're content, I am. It's always been my endeavour to do what is best for my family. Only seeing Frances Ann and Rose Emma doing well, it's natural I should like to know that you would be left comfortable."

"I am all right, mamma ; don't trouble about me. I don't want anything but to be let alone and do my own work."

"Yes," and Mrs. Ferguson sighed, "that was always your way. Just your poor papa over again. Dear me ! he was always for being let alone, never anything more than that. And how is Mrs. Haythorne?"

"That is what I came to tell you about. I am not going back again to Mrs. Haythorne at all."

“Gracious goodness ! child, you don’t say so ! Not to teach the little boy, nor anything ! Why, has she sent you away ?”

“No. I came away on my own account. Some things have been happening lately which vexed me very much—things that Mrs. Haythorne said. At last it was more than I could bear. So I have come away.”

Audrey’s pent-up feelings became at last too much for her. She burst into tears.

Mrs. Ferguson had a woman’s heart and a mother’s tenderness under all her rough, bustling ways. Letting the plums go where they liked, she held out her arms and said,

“Come to me, child. You’re best with them that love you. It was never my will to let you go among people that think themselves so much better than what you are. I should like to know what that Madam Haythorne has been saying to any child of mine, and I would go straight down

and tell her a piece of my mind about it—ay, if she were the biggest lady in Dimplethorpe, which she isn't yet by a long way, for all the fuss she makes. I shouldn't wonder but that she and Miss Burnaby have been putting their heads together about it."

"Oh, no, mamma, you need never think that. Miss Burnaby has always been my friend. And when she wanted me to go to Mrs. Haythorne, it was because she thought it would be a really good thing for me. And perhaps it was, at first."

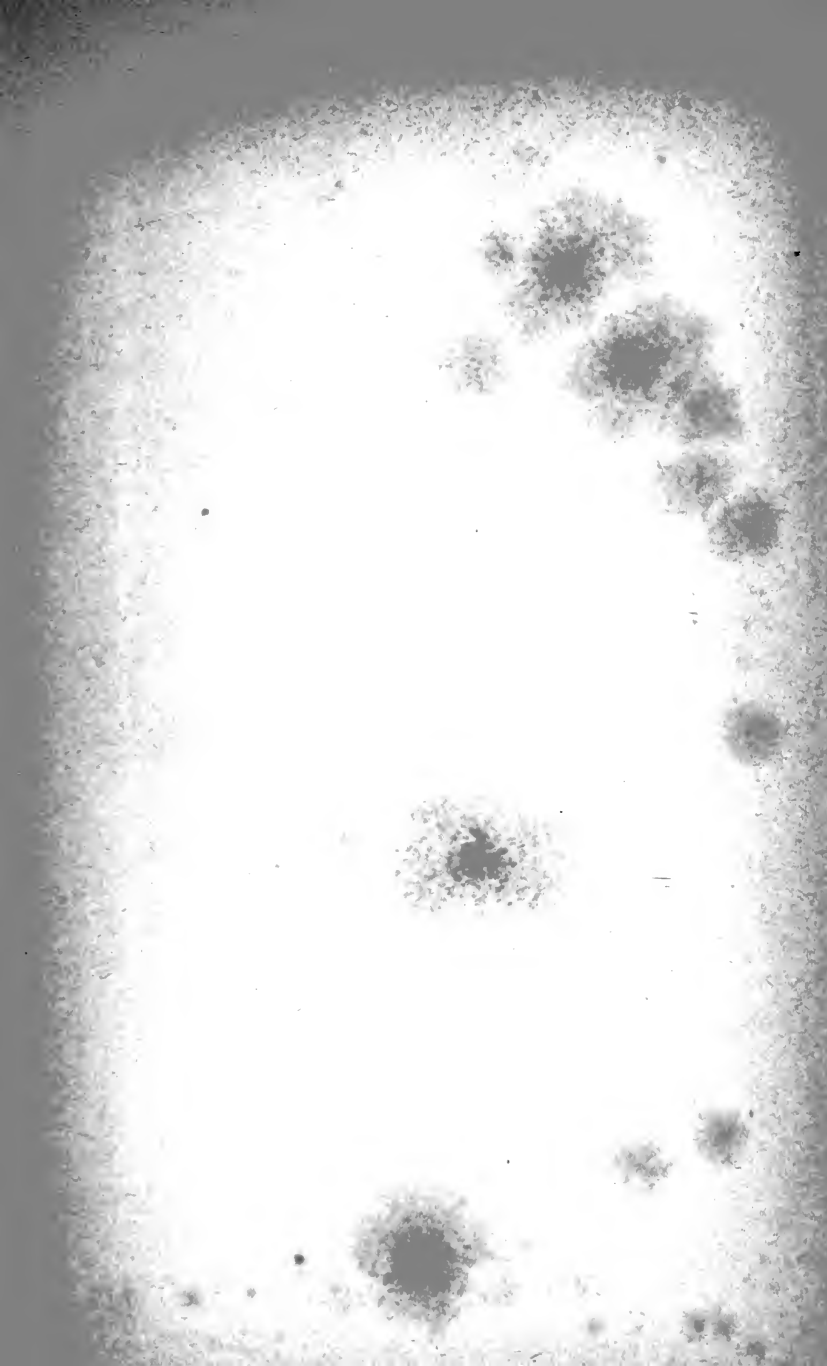
"Well, child, I don't know, and so I can't say; but, as far as ever I've seen, it's never a good thing to be housed with them that aren't of the same sort as yourself. I daresay she has been wanting you to do something that it wasn't your place to do."

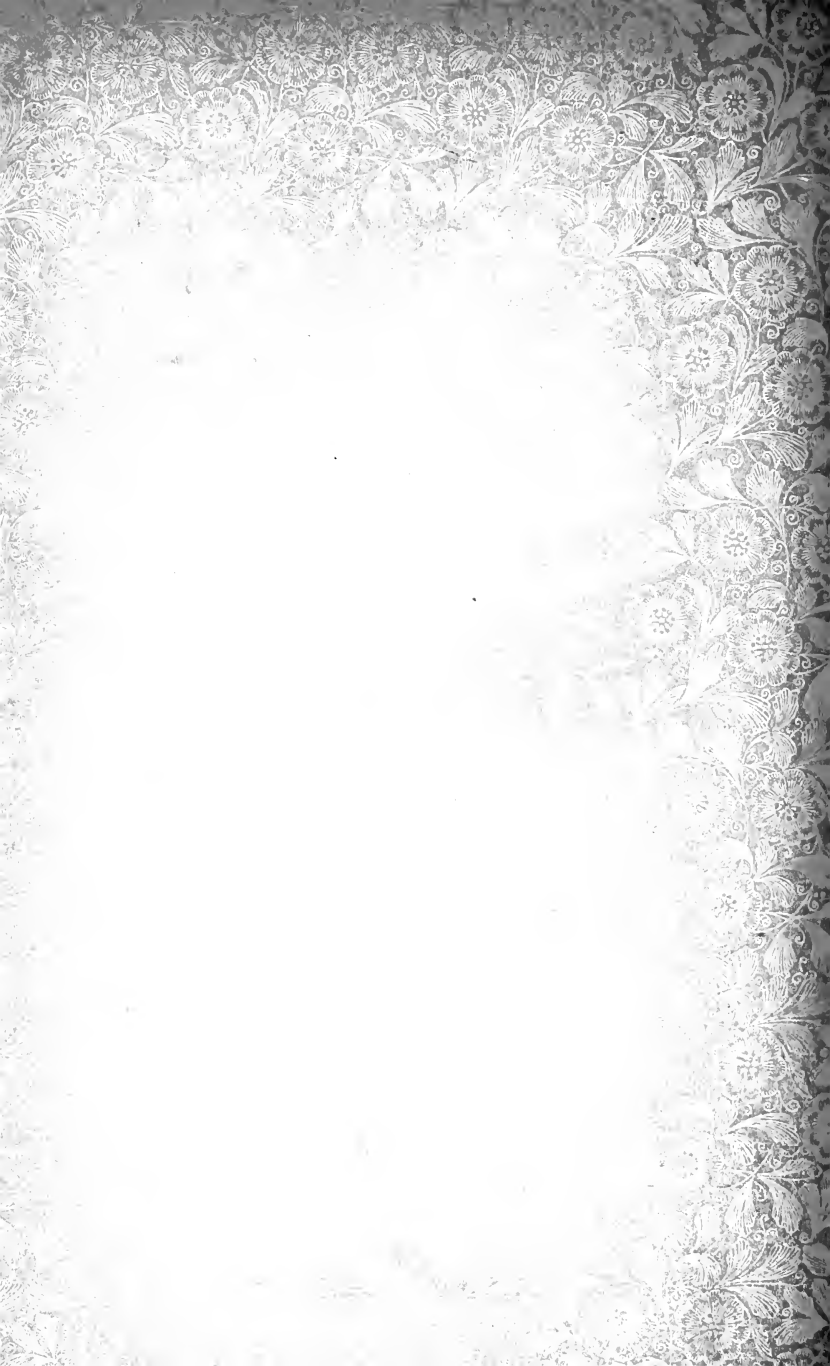
"I will tell you to-morrow, mamma. But you may trust me, I would not have come away unless I had had good reason."

“I can do that, Audrey. And now let us get these plums picked up, and then take your hat off, and I’ll tell Abigail to put the cold beef on. Rose Emma and Mr. Tewksby can’t be long now, and Cousin Tholthorpe will not think to ask any questions, for it’s always been a settled thing that you might come back any day, whenever the Major returned. I’ll warrant he is put to it often enough with her, by all accounts. Come your ways in. It’s a comfort you’ve got a home to come to, where there’s somebody to give you a welcome.”

And Audrey, as she helped her mother to gather up the plums, and then went into the trim little back-parlour, thought so too.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







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